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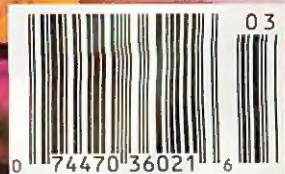
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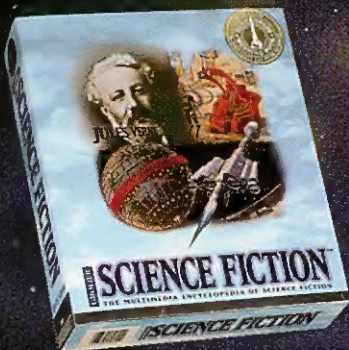
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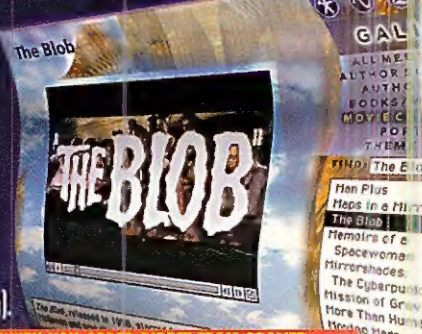
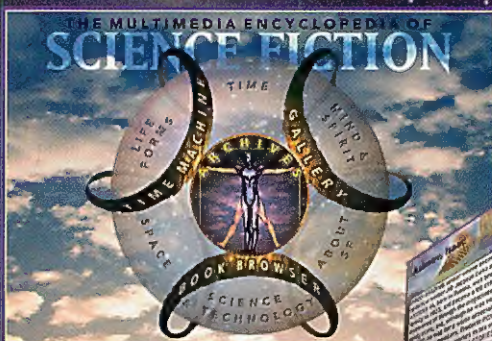
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COVER: In the electronic future, will we judge the robots? Or will they judge us? The Positronic Man by Stephen Youll. ABOVE: Richard Powers changed the face of SF illustration. See our Gallery on page 76.

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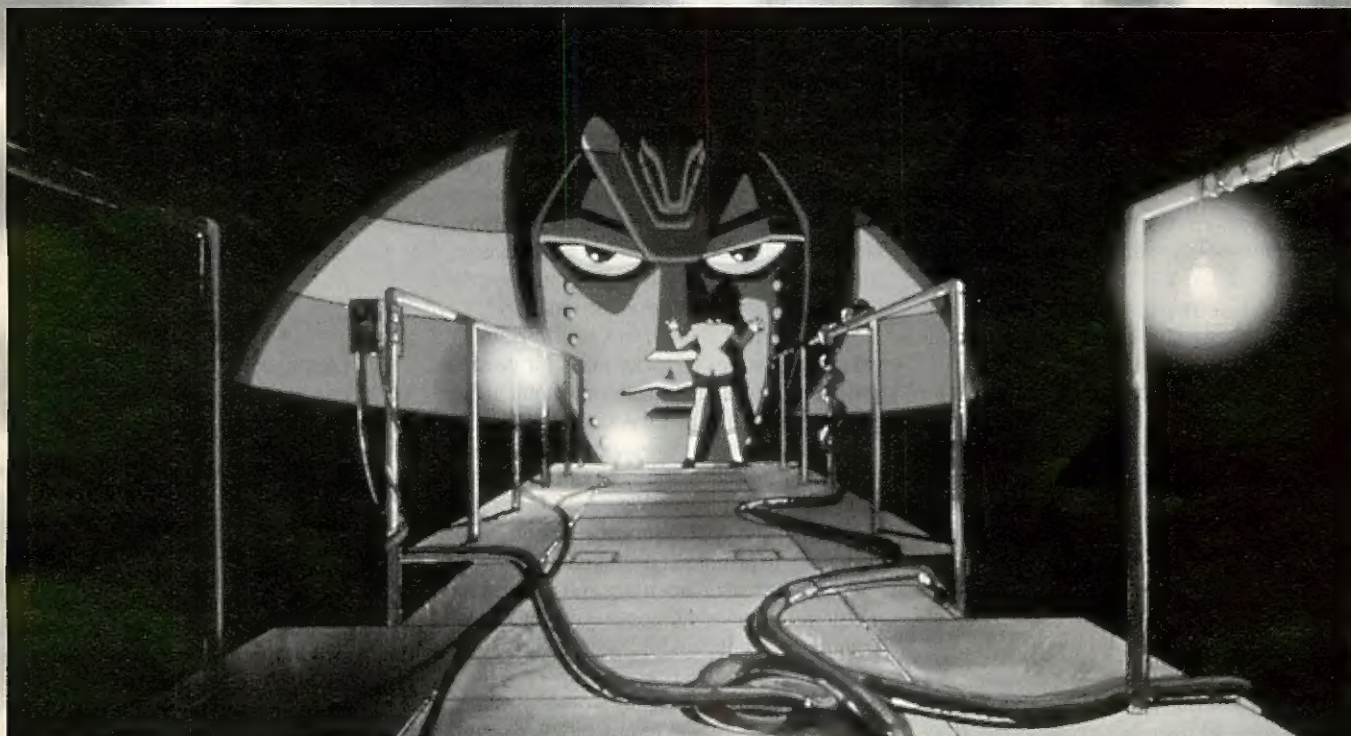
Communicating with an alien race will not be easy. In fact, it may be deadly.

88 THE ALZHEIMER LAUREATE

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We have seen the future of literature, and its name is—Dominic McLock?

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Top: Giant Robo
Left: Legend of Lemnear
Right: Phantom Quest Corp.

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Dear Mr. Edelman:

I am not in the habit of writing letters to the editor. As a matter of fact, this is my first such letter!

However, while I am still "touched" by what I've read, I must write to you and two of your authors regarding the November 1995 issue.

Please accept my compliments and extend them to author Kandis Elliot for "The Androgynous Murders" — very good work!

And please accept and extend my compliments to author Pete D. Manison for "VR Marsbase 1" — outstanding! It's been a long, long time since a short story has grabbed me the way this one did.

That is to say, gentle editor, I'm glad now that I renewed my subscription. Please keep such downright good SF coming to those of us who are subscribers. We actually do appreciate it.

Congratulations to authors Elliot and Manison. Thanks.

Respectfully and appreciatively,
Robert E. Myers

Dear Sirs:

While I admire Ralph McQuarrie's work very much and hope to purchase *The Illustrated Star Wars Universe* some day, I cannot resist pointing out that in the picture captioned "Princess Leia Organa and Lando Calrissian enjoy the view from an upper pavilion on Cloud City," there are two errors. The Princess is wearing the wrong gown and hair style. Leia first met Lando in the second *Star Wars* motion picture *The Empire Strikes Back*. By that time the buns Leia had worn in *Star Wars: The New Hope* had been replaced by braids with the ends fastened behind her ears and she had shed the flowing, virginal white gown with more sophisticated form-fitting ones in shades of blue and brown.

These mistakes are surprising since Mr. McQuarrie created so much of the physical *Star Wars* universe. I am still looking forward to buying the book and seeing the newly created art work, however.

Sincerely,
Jeanne Caripbell

McQuarrie's depiction was no mistake, Jeanne. What you saw was not a painting done after the fact to depict a scene from the movie, but rather a preproduction drawing created to help envision the future that was yet to be lensed. We can only assume that McQuarrie's sketches were put to paper before the final costuming decisions were made. So, in fact, rather than considering any differences an error, you can chalk them up to being an integral part of being granted an insider's behind-the-scenes peek.

Dear Mr. Edelman:

In the November 1995 issue of *Science Fiction Age*, there was an interesting interview in the Science department about the prospects for terraforming Mars. I, like many science fiction fans, believe in the manifest destiny of man and space. I also believe it won't happen through dreams and good intentions. In particular, the enthusiasm over terraforming Mars in the SF community is most alarming. Mars will never be terraformed in the classic "take off your helmet and walk around" sense because, in a word, Mars is too small.

Mars reached the perfect equilibrium of volatile molecules to rocky mass for its size and position from the sun at some point in the past and has remained the same to this day. Expose the subterranean water to the surface at warmer latitudes and it would evaporate away to be lost forever. Water can only exist on Mars in the cool subterranean and polar regions or in pressurized containers.

That is no reason not to try and make Mars a little more pleasant. Some types of micro-organisms will undoubtedly thrive in microniches and as the axiom everywhere says, "They can't make it any worse." Besides, controlled experiment or not, biological contamination will inevitably occur.

A better choice for concerted effort would be Venus, which is larger than Mars and about 20 percent smaller than Earth. It already has an atmosphere, albeit a toxic one. More importantly, the presence of clouds — not colored gases but actual clouds — indicates evaporation and precipitation, which indicate bodies of water. The water may be vast oceans of acid, but that is still a step up from Mars, which would have to be battered with comets until almost twice its current size to accomplish the same thing.

Matt Powell

Dear Readers:

In our January issue, the artist credit was inadvertently left off the 1996 bonus pull-out calendar we provided to make sure you had a science fictional year. As you gaze up at the wall where you have by now surely placed it in a position of prominence, please make note that the artwork used was created by the amazing John Berkey, who has provided numerous cover paintings and interior illustrations for Science Fiction Age over the years.

Scott Edelman
Editor

Readers—please let us know how we're doing at: Letters to the Editor, Science Fiction Age, P. O. Box 369, Damascus, MD 20872, or E-mail to S.Edelman1@Genie.Geis.Com.

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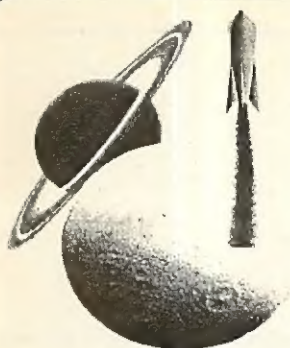
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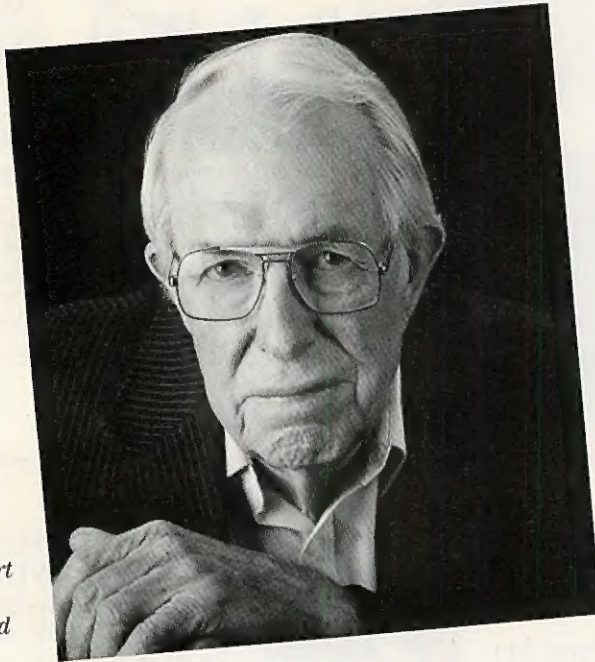
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By Scott Edelman

Science Fiction's greatest gifts are sometimes close enough to touch.



Jack Williamson's novels are still a vital part of SF. Art and design by Shelley Eshkar and Jan Uretsky.

THERE I SAT IN A MEETING ROOM OF PHILADELPHIA'S Adams Mark Hotel, to my left and right other magazine editors in the science fiction, fantasy, and horror field. It was the 55th incarnation of Philcon, the world's oldest SF convention, which had been meeting almost every year since 1936. I was there taking part in a "Meet the Editors" panel, expecting the usual audience normally composed of neophytes still trying to break in. And as I looked out on the hopeful faces of beginning writers who'd come to learn whatever secrets each of us could give them that would help them crack into print in our pages, I thought —

What is Jack Williamson doing out there? Born in 1908, Jack Williamson's first published story was "The Metal Man" in *Amazing* in 1928. His *Legion of Space* stories were some of the most popular of the '30s. In the '40s, his *See-tee* tales were a vital part of John Campbell's revolutionary Golden Age of SF. The '50s saw his *Eden* collaborations with Frederik Pohl, with whom he continued writing the popular *Starchild* series of novels in the '60s. As for the past three decades, he has continued writing novels and short stories of astonishing youth, strength, and vigor. He has published vital science fiction in each of the past eight decades, the only SF writer ever to have done so.

And there he sat, that year's Philcon Guest of Honor, in fact, listening as humbly as any new writer to the supposed words of wisdom of us editors, all of whom had grown up reading his work. It seemed unfairly lopsided. We were the ones who should have been listening to *him*, and not the other way around. And when the audience members kept asking, "Tell us — what do we have to do?" as if we had some magic

secrets to impart (the answer to which is that the only secret we editors have is that there is no magic secret), that's just what we did. I finally had to draft Jack Williamson himself for use as a serendipitous visual aid.

If you want to write science fiction, I told them all, then *read* science fiction. If a neat idea pops into your head, don't just stop there — Williamson probably wrote a story about the same neat idea sixty years ago. You have to do more than just the obvious. You have to build it into something new.

Jack Williamson smiled when his name was mentioned, and one of us asked him how he — a man who lived a mythic life, who as a child traveled West in a covered wagon — did what he did so well and for so long.

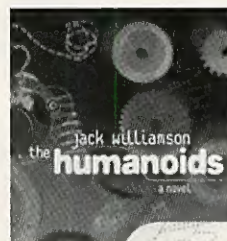
"All I do," he said, "is put my dreams on paper."

One of the miracles of science fiction is that those who have for lifetimes put their dreams on paper are there for us to meet in person. I have written in these pages of the wonderful places that are SF conventions. But I have perhaps skipped unfairly over one of the highlights of the science fiction community — that its founders are so often in evidence, ready to give a helping hand to newcomers, offering themselves as comrades in arms, eager to share their accumulated wisdom with the rest of us.

Readers of science fiction offer its sense of wonder as one of the pleasures of the genre. But there is another kind of sense of wonder, and that is the kind experienced from listening to someone like Williamson, who was a part of science fiction before it was even called science fiction, talk about his childhood and what the discovery of the literature of other worlds and other times meant to someone who grew up with no indoor plumbing, no electricity or telephone and who used furniture made of rawhide and saplings. It is the sense of wonder that comes from being privileged to be in the presence of giants.

Jack Williamson isn't the only giant still with us. And we should remember that. For too often we only say "thank you" after those we admire are no longer with us. And testimonials do no good to those who are unable to hear them. So thank you, those of you who are luckily still here to hear our thanks. Thank you, A. E. van Vogt, born 1912, for writing "Black Destroyer," *Slan*, and *The Weapons Shop of Isher*. Thanks to you, Arthur C. Clarke, born 1917, for "The Nine Billion Names of God" and *Childhood's End*. Thank you, L. Sprague de Camp (b. 1907) and Jack Vance (b. 1916) and Andre Norton (b. 1912). Thank you Horace Gold (b. 1914), Julius Schwartz (b. 1915), and R. A. Lafferty (b. 1914). Thank you, Frederik Pohl (b. 1919), for "Day Million" and "The Gold at Starbow's End." Thank you David Kyle (b. 1915), Robert A. Lowndes (b. 1916), and Charles L. Harness (b. 1915).

You all helped make science fiction what it is today. We look forward to having you continue to be with us when we discover whether next century's tomorrows look like your dreams. □



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Bujold's next Hugo-winner goes backward in time.

Bujold's Miles Vorkosigan has become one of SF's most popular characters. Art by Gary Ruddell.



CETAGANDA (BAEN BOOKS, HARDCOVER, 304 pages, \$21.00) is the latest book in Lois McMaster Bujold's award-winning *Vorkosigan* series, featuring the far-future science fiction adventures of the young Lieutenant Lord Miles Vorkosigan of Barrayar, a k a Admiral Miles Naismith of the Dendarii Free Mercenary Fleet. The series now includes nine novels, one of which is made up of three separately published novellas. The series has made Bujold the most lauded author in the military-SF subgenre, with multiple Hugo Awards and Nebula Awards. The previous three books in this series (*The Vor Game*, *Barrayar*, and *Mirror Dance*) each won the Hugo Award for best novel.

The numerous awards won by Bujold's *Vorkosigan* series is in many ways easily explainable, but in some aspects surprising.

Both conceptually and literarily, specific works of science fiction can be classified along a continuum of progressive to regressive. SF that envisions a future when humans, society, and technology are markedly changed from today or any past time can be seen as conceptually progressive, while fiction about

future worlds that have more in common with the past or present can be considered to various degrees conceptually regressive. Likewise, specific SF works can be categorized in terms of literary style as either regressive, favoring the straightforward narrative styles of classic SF, or literarily progressive in seeking to use more modern literary techniques or even evolve new literary styles. As a general rule, to which there have always been a few notable exceptions, fans voting for the Hugo Award have favored conceptually progressive fiction, while the authors voting for the Nebula Award have favored literarily progressive works.

Yet the fiction of Lois McMaster Bujold that has won both Hugos and Nebulas falls clearly into the regressive mode, both conceptually and literarily. The far-future interstellar society of Miles Naismith Vorkosigan has more in common with 19th century Europe than modern Western society, the technological extrapolation has more than enough conundrums to set any Hard SF fan's teeth grinding, and the literary narrative style is straight from the classic SF of fifty years ago. Bujold's series thereby joins the ranks of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series, and other classic science fiction books that have won awards and been immensely popular despite being both conceptually and literarily regressive.

The strengths of Bujold's *Vorkosigan* series include a distinctive and interesting young protagonist, a colorful future milieu, and compelling narratives in which the protagonist cleverly uncovers plots of Byzantine complexity and foils his antagonists despite overwhelming odds. Bujold is not an innovator in the field, but an expert synthesizer who chooses among the best tropes of classic SF to create her characters, backgrounds, and stories. There are strong echoes of *Dune*, for instance, in the social structures and technology of Bujold's far future, and of Keith Laumer's classic *Retief* series in the interaction between Miles and the various interstellar empire diplomats and officials.

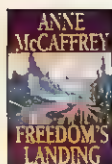
Bujold has not written her novels in the order in which events have occurred, and *Cetaganda* takes place relatively early in Miles' career (at age 22). The story involves Miles and his cousin Ivan attending a state funeral, representing Barrayar, on Eta Ceta IV, capital of the powerful, aggressive,

nine-planet Cetagandan Empire. The empire is ruled by a royal patriarchy, backed up by a matriarchy that controls genetic planning for the royal (haut) class, both in terms of their children and creating sexless loyal slaves (*ba*), and which provides beautiful spouses to be given to leaders of the military (*ghem*) class to keep them loyal.

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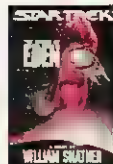
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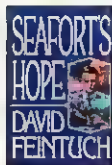
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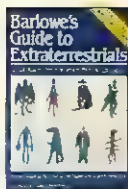
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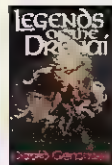
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ately upon Miles' and Ivan's arrival at the space station above the planet, as they are mistakenly boarded by a ba carrying a strange device, which it abandons when it realizes it has boarded the wrong ship. Miles decides not to inform his own embassy officials or Cetagandan officials, and tries to discover on his own what plot is unfolding. When during one of the initial memorial ceremonies the ba from whom he took the device was found dead, he deduces there must be a connection, but cannot determine what that connection could possibly be.

He soon learns that the symbol on the device is of the Star Creche, the royal matriarchy's innermost circle, and is contacted surreptitiously by a beautiful representative of that group, who accuses him of stealing the device from their ba. Miles is able to trade the details of his story for further information, including that the device is the sole key to the Star Creche genetic code computer used to store all Cetagandan genetic information. Miles offers to return

the key, but when he does it is found to be a defective copy, which should not exist.

From this Miles deduces that someone is trying to set him up to create a major incident between the Cetagandan Empire and Barrayar, possibly to provoke another war. As usual, he takes it upon himself to solve the mystery and thwart the scheme. As Miles attends various affairs, both formal and private, with Ivan and official Barrayaran ambassadors and diplomats he cleverly puts together the plot, avoids several attempts to assassinate him, and secretly aids the Cetagandan civil authorities in apprehending the ghem General responsible, returning the real Great Key to the matriarchs of the Star Creche. He also thwarts the attempt to provoke a war, and makes sure the Star Creche data is broadcast in order to save it, thereby forcing the Cetagandans to delay indefinitely their plans to expand their empire.

Despite his somewhat rightist, military attitudes, Miles Vorkosigan is a likable character.

He is physically unimpressive, owing to an attempt to assassinate his mother with poison gas which caused teratogenic effects, including stunted growth and brittle bones (as told in the earlier novel, *Barrayar*). But he is both clever and resourceful, often succeeding primarily due to others underestimating him. The galactic empire societies in which the *Vorkosigan* series takes place have a baroque charm similar to many popular fantasy worlds. But the greatest strength of Bujold's novels is probably the carefully paced, intricate plotting that allows her characters and milieu to be revealed at just the proper timing to hold reader interest throughout.

Cetaganda is a worthy addition to Bujold's *Vorkosigan* series, and will not disappoint her fans. SF adventure fans who have not yet read a book in the series should start by reading some of the earlier books to get a better feel for Miles Naismith Vorkosigan and the complex far-future worlds in which he operates.

***The Tranquillity Alternative*, by Allen Steele, Ace, hardcover, 320 pages, \$21.95.**

Allen Steele is positively *besotted* with space: inebriate of vacuum is he, a man drunk on the liberating, romantic allure of escaping the local gravity well (both as imaginatively captured in SF and as witnessed in the grittier realities of astronautics over the past century since Goddard and Tsiolkovsky). You know from reading his novels that if NASA came calling for civilian volunteers to ride an experimental rocket cobbled together from surplus parts from the farm-subsidy program, Steele would be suited up and ready to go before the cows could get on the treadmill.

Steele first came to prominence with a loosely linked trio of novels that sought to portray mankind's near-future expansion into orbital and lunar environments with as much verisimilitude as this journalism-trained author could bring to bear. In *Orbital Decay* (1989), we got to ride the shoulders of the construction workers building an orbiting station for the private enterprise known as Sky-corp, circa 2014. By 2049, humanity was living in the O'Neill-style colonies of *Clarke County, Space* (1990). *Lunar Descent* (1991) jumped backward in the internal chronology to 2024 and gave us an updated version of Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966).

With his new book, *The Tranquillity Alternative*, Steele's transcendent lust to burst the bounds of our terrestrial cradle has escaped this future history timeline entirely. So expansive is his desire to portray some kind of progress in space exploration that he has jumped ship, so to speak. As its witty title indicates, this book is set in an alternate universe, one where space exploration took off sooner, with grander results.

Here's the core of the scenario, as doled out in tantalizing interchapter soundbites, as well as in nuggets embedded in the narrative. During World War II, Hitler's experimental sub-orbital bomber made a daring, luckily thwarted raid on the continental United

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Common Clay: Twenty Odd Stories, by Brian Aldiss (St. Martin's). A collection by the award-winning author that will instruct you in "The Mistakes, Miseries, and Misfortunes of Mankind," as well as what would have happened "If Hamlet's Uncle Had Been a Nicer Guy."

Off Limits: Tales of Alien Sex, edited by Ellen Datlow (Picador). The perfect companion to heat up those cold winter nights, thanks to alien explorers Martha Soukup, Bruce McAllister, Samuel R. Delany, and twenty others. Introduction by Robert Silverberg.

Delta City, by Felicity Savage (Penguin Roc). Following up on her marvelous debut novel and her eagerly awaited short stories, Savage continues the saga of Humility Garden, the first and last human Divinarch in a finely realized world. A Jack Vance for the '90s.

Dreamweaver's Dilemma, by Lois McMaster Bujold (NESFA Press). This multiple award-winning writer and creator of future hero Miles Vorkosigan (see lead review) has more than ably crafted novels going for her, as this handsome short story collection amply proves.



The Time Ships, by Stephen Baxter (Harper Prism). Since H. G. Wells is no longer around to do so, Baxter has had to step forward with the sequel to *The Time Machine* instead. Now, the anonymous time traveler finds that the future isn't all it's cracked up to be.

The Humanoids, by Jack Williamson (Orb Books). If you've already read this issue's editorial, then you know that Jack Williamson is a national treasure. This classic of natural versus artificial life first appeared fifty years ago, but still has the power to spellbind.

Brothers, by Ben Bova (Bantam Spectra). The award-winning author and editor tells the tale of a scientist unfortunate enough to discover a successful method of organ regeneration only to find all the forces of science, politics, and the law fighting against him.

All One Universe, by Poul Anderson (Tor). Like the Energizer Bunny, Anderson keeps on delivering solid science fiction, as this collection of his most recent short fiction proves. Pick this one up to remember why you fell in love with SF in the first place.

The Black Flame, by Stanley G. Weinbaum (Tachyon Press). This newly restored edition of Weinbaum's classic novel (which appeared in *Startling Stories*, 1939) adds back 18,000 words that were cut for its original publication. Sam Moskowitz's introduction recounts the tale of the book's long history.

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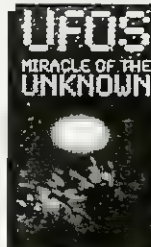
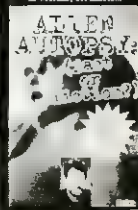


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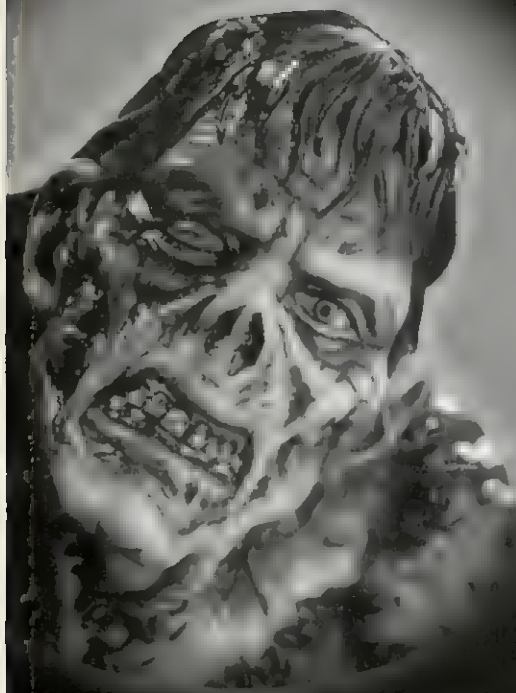
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States. This impetus was enough to turn America's eyes spacewards. Under Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon, RFK, McCarthy, Dole, and Clinton, the American space program traversed an arc of achievement, basically following the famous Willy Ley program of the '50s. A space wheel, a lunar settlement, and a single expedition to Mars (jointly with the Russians) were the height of the parabola. But now, under niggling budget constraints, the United States is turning its back on the future. The space station is decaying, the Tranquillity Moon Base has been mothballed, and a return to Mars is out of the question.

Meanwhile, other countries are picking up the slack. Japan has two launchpads, the European Space Agency is active, as are even the mysterious North Koreans! When Tranquillity Base is finally sold to the Germans and America must remove some nuclear missiles stored there, one final American mission is mounted. Steele's narrative covers the mere seven days of that mission — a week jam-packed with treachery, heroism, interpersonal strife, and realpolitik gameplaying.

At a few points, the wordage Steele devotes to reaching the Moon and the violent climax thereon seems almost as lengthy as covering the actual quarter-million miles in person. After reading one account of the laborious nature of suiting up, for instance, or the difficulties of eating in zero-gravity, the second and third begin to pale. But mostly the narrative eminently sustains the reader's interest. (This is crucial, of course, in a book built to resemble a hi-tech thriller. As in his previous *The Jericho Iteration* [1994], Steele seems to be moving deliberately, gingerly into Tom Clancy territory.) So whenever details of space travel threaten to overwhelm, Steele can be counted on to toss in a mutant cultural zinger (a living Elvis as the opening act for U2) or a pertinent character revelation (the kinky virtual-sex tastes of hacker Paul Dooley; the father-son troubles of mission leader Gene Parnell).

The Tranquillity Alternative represents both a departure and a continuation for Steele. On the sameness front, we notice several recycled motifs, aside from the obvious focus on space exploration. The book's opening chapter, with its professional assassins stalking a victim, recalls the first chapter of *Clarke County, Space*. From *Lunar Descent*, we get the trope of the old gunfighter recalled to service. In the older book, that role was played by Lester Riddell; here it's Gene Parnell. Steele's penchant for recursive references to SF itself also crops up again, but funnier. His take on alternate history *Star Trek* is very good. And the gonzo spacetug pilot we knew as Virgin Bruce in *Orbital Decay* is here called Dr. Z.

But more important is what Steele is doing differently. This is his best-written book yet on a structural and sentence-by-sentence level. Once prone to sound like your wise-cracking kid brother, Steele here is muted and elegiac, even attaining actual poetry. "The decks are darkened, but moonlight shines

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through the portholes, eerily illuminating the long shadows of the slumbering forms; unencumbered by gravity, their hands drift above their chests, making them look like sleepwalkers who have been pinned down against their will." In addition, he plays with historical and cultural factors in a more fluent way. Although I must say that Steele's alternate timeline converges on ours so closely in spots that I began to wonder about the plausibility of certain parallels. Yet who can say from experience how strongly certain dominant attractors would shape events?

In the end, Steele's tale of "retro" rockets is a forlorn paean to a world that holds a pitted mirror to ours.

Paul Di Filippo

Intersections: The Sycamore Hill

Anthology, edited by John Kessel, Mark L. Van Name, and Richard Butner, Tor Books, hardcover, 384 pp., \$23.95.

In August of 1994, Bruce Sterling, Karen Joy Fowler, Nancy Kress, Jonathan Lethem, Michaela Roessner, Robert Frazier, Alexander Jablovkov, Maureen F. McHugh, Carol Emshwiller, John Kessel, Mark L. Van Name, Gregory Frost, Richard Butner, and James Patrick Kelly came together in Raleigh, North Carolina, for the Seventh Annual Sycamore Hill's Writers' Conference. They spent a week workshopping one another's stories and living together in a campus dorm. At the end of the week, they went home and rewrote the stories. They also wrote afterwords summarizing the critiques they'd received and commenting on the SycHill experience. John Kessel, Mark Van Name, and Richard Butner compiled the stories and the afterwords, and the result is *Intersections*, a terrific anthology of original fiction that is also an inside look at the premier writer's workshop in science fiction.

The motto of SycHill is "Adequate Science Fiction." As John Kessel, Mark Van Name, and Richard Butner write in the anthology's introduction, "We aimed to write better, but we could not claim to be the best. But we also thought that much published SF was inadequate." All of the stories in *Intersections* are adequate, and most of them much more than that. The only thing that frustrates about the anthology are the afterwords.

The afterwords to each story make it clear that however good the writers think the workshop is for their fiction, they would not come if they didn't enjoy having a week to get away from their lives and spend time with each other. As Fowler puts it in her afterword, "For a few days every couple summers, I am allowed to live in an alternate universe where books and reading are important."

Or as Richard Butner puts it, "It is not at all a bad gig, blowing off most of your responsibilities for a week and just being a writer in the company of writers."

When it comes to the actual workshopping of the stories the views are much more ambivalent. Nancy Kress, in her afterword, talks about the benefits of having a story critiqued, but she



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adds, "Other times, a story is clear to the author *until* a workshop discusses it. Then the contradictory criticism and passionate suggestions hopelessly loosen whatever grip the writer thought he had on his own material."

John Kessel, one of the founding fathers of SycHill, says, "After you've been to a few workshops, you begin to see that the critiques are not the most important part, though you couldn't have a good workshop without them. They are the foundation, not the house." Therein is the answer to the question, "If the critiques are the worst part of the week, why do them?" The workshoping provides the reason for being.

At the back of the anthology are two appendices. The second is a list of all forty of the writers who have attended at least one of the SycHill workshops. It is a list that reads like a who's who of the Hugo and Nebula nominees for the past ten years. Despite the impressive talents involved in SycHill, so far only one story critiqued at the workshop has gone on to win a major award. That story was Connie Willis' "Death on the Nile." Did the SycHill critiques help "Death" win? Or did they prevent her three previous SycHill efforts from winning?

Turning to the stories that are actually in *Intersections*, my favorite is Karen Fowler's story, "The Marianas Islands." According to her afterword, "Marianas" won the unofficial SycHill award for hardest story to critique. It isn't any easier to review. I am tempted to

merely quote Bruce Sterling's comment reproduced in the afterword ("The godlike genius of Karen Fowler defies the critical calipers.") and move on. The first three paragraphs of Karen's story constitute the best opening to a story in a book full of great beginnings. The rest of the story simply lives up to the beginning.

The first appendix of the anthology reprints the Turkey City Lexicon, a list of rules and terms for writing and describing SF stories. Bruce Sterling demonstrates how violatable these rules are by starting his story (the first one in the anthology) with an example of "White-room Syndrome." He goes on to commit a lot of "Telling, Not Showing" and sticks in plenty of "Brand-name Fever," but all the while he is building such a funny and believable future, that you don't mind all the exposition. "The Bicycle Repairman" is a sequel to Bruce's earlier "Deep Eddy" and is its mirror. This time the young cyberpunk is the sexless native and the death commando is the stranger in a strange land. The confrontation between the death commando and the Chatanooga social worker alone is worth the price of admission.

The story I would most like to have seen the submission version of is Maureen McHugh's "Homesick." According to her afterword, only five paragraphs of her submission version survived the revision, and yet (with the exception of cutting the alien culture) none of the changes sounded like things I would have

wanted to see dropped. With nothing more than her afterword and the very subdued revision to go on, it seems possible that Maureen was the most affected by the workshop's prejudice that stories "stay affectless."

Mark Van Name's story, "Missing Connections," is in some ways the most ambitious story in the collection. "Connections" attempts not just comedy, not just romantic comedy, but romantic *geek* comedy. On the point of finally meeting the cyber-girl of his dreams, Johnny loses her when his roommate "borrows" his e-mail account to send her (and many others) a pornographic post. Will Johnny be able to find his dream woman and win her back? "Connections" never achieves laugh-out-loud funniness, but it doesn't fall on its butt either.

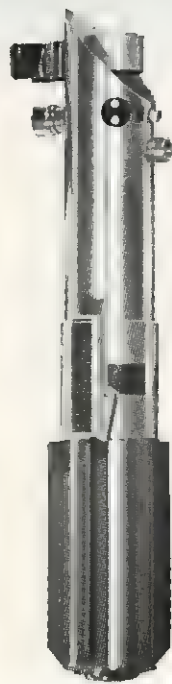
Perhaps oddly in an anthology that contains two stories about spiritualism, the most chilling entry is Jonathan Lethem's "The Hardened Criminals." It has plausibility problems from the word go, but as soon as you accept the central (and horrific) assumption, the rest of the story flows logically. There is a "Stand By Me" opening and a prison rape scene, but they are both necessary to this story about a boy's search for his father, and for himself.

Alexander Jablov's "The Fury at Colonus" is a retelling of the Oresteia myth from the point of view of the Fury sent to pursue Orestes. Alexander fuses modern and classical elements into a story that is as much a critique of today's culture (the O.J. trial was in

Continued on page 97



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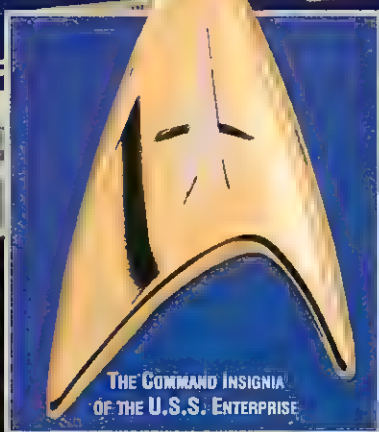


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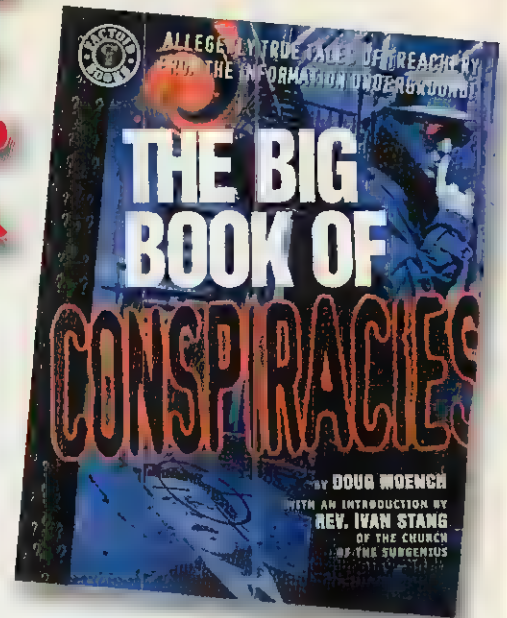
Some human artifacts transcend judgment and slide so far down the scale of bad that they hit good, zoom so far "Out" that they're actually "In." Witness the day almost three decades ago when William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy stepped

Music inside recording studios determined to use their roles as the handsome starship captain and his ever-logical Vulcan science officer to launch their singing careers. At the time, Shatner's *The Transformed Man* and Leonard Nimoy's *Sings Songs of Space* were novelty albums that were snapped up by solely the most dedicated fans, only to vanish along with lava lamps.

Now that the '60s have turned into the '90s, surprise, lava lamps are "In" again, and so are these two compilations, thanks to Varese Vintage's rediscovery series.

William Shatner's tortured renditions of "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," by now treasured classics of over-emoting well-known to strong-stomached Trekkers, will have Dylan and the Beatles siding with the Klingons. Nimoy's delivery on SF-themed songs such as the Kurt Weill-Maxwell Anderson "Lost in the Stars" is less bombastic, but it makes an equally fascinating artifact. Thanks to the benefits of hindsight, what were at the time just mildly interesting tie-ins have become hilarious party albums well worth owning. Beam them up!

Shatner and Nimoy in rare form.

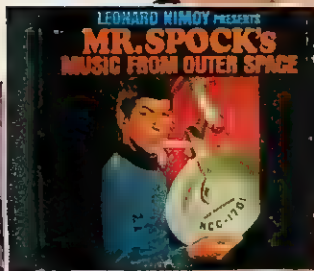


Stranger Than SF

Man never went to the Moon — the lunar landings were all filmed on a Hollywood back lot. Our government has known of the existence of aliens ever since a U.F.O. crashed in Roswell, New Mexico — and your elected officials want to keep it from you. And evidence of life on Mars is being suppressed. Science Fiction? More like science fact, according to Doug Moench,

Books author of *The Big Book of Conspiracies* (Paradox Press), a comic-book style recounting of dozens of conspiracy theories, illustrated by artists as diverse as comic-book veteran Russ Heath and underground cartoonist Justin Green. Moench was intrigued by shadowy forces long before *The X-Files* dragged the rest of America kicking and screaming into addicted paranoia. "I was about 15 when I saw Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald. That was when I was convinced that something was really wrong, and they're not telling us. There's more to this than one lone nut killing another lone nut. I was working at *The Chicago Sun-Times* during Watergate, and I wasn't obsessed with it, but I really felt that the powers that be were doing things behind the scenes that they sure weren't telling us. I took that for granted." Describing the trade paperback as an "above ground underground,"

Moench feels that the work is "fulfilling my vision of what truly adult comics would be." We feel sure that in this instance, Scully and Mulder would agree.



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As you cybersurf the World Wide Web, remember to pay a visit to these recommended home pages.

http://riceinfo.rice.edu/projects/RDA/VirtualCity/Sterling/sterling_res.html

Web World

Bruce Sterling, the Chairman of Cyberpunk, has been online, producing tons of net.nift, for many years. Included at this site are links to the complete text of *The Hacker Crackdown*, many articles, speech transcripts, bibliographies, reading lists and reviews.

<http://aragorn.greyware.com/authors/>

A company has started offering free Web sites to any paid-up member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. This site includes pages devoted to a couple of dozen writers, many of whom have placed sample chapters or complete short stories online. The design is workmanlike, if largely uninspiring.



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This is online publishing done right. Search the entire catalog of current Del Ray titles (and order them!), view scanned cover art from hundreds of books, subscribe to an online update, and read sample chapters of current titles.

<http://www.toystory.com>

This impressive computer-generated film has spawned an impressive Web site. Download video clips, games, sound files, and icons. Read bios of the cast and crew. Sign up for the inevitable online contest. <http://www.ssc.com/~roland/x-files/x-files.html>

The coolest of the *X-Files* Web sites. The author has barred users of America Online and the Microsoft Network from seeing this one, so if you're stranded, check out the far more pasteurized official site, at <http://www.thex-files.com/>.

<telnet://moo.eskimo.com:7777>

DragonsFire MOO is an interactive, text-based role-playing game for up to forty players set in a recreated virtual geography from Anne McCaffrey's *Pern*.

—Cory Doctorow

Frankenstein Comes Alive

In the beginning (of Science Fiction, at least) stands Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. For many, this tale of an obsessed scientist delving into things best left alone marked the birthplace of our genre. Berni Wrightson, famed artist of *Swamp Thing* and *Captain Stern*, dedicated two years to completing a series of illustrations to accompany a reissue of that classic tale. Now, one of those pieces

Collectibles makes the leap from bookshelf to desktop. Side-

show, Inc. has just issued the first in a series of high quality vinyl model kits based on the works of Berni Wrightson. Dan Platt, who has done model work on such films as *Terminator 2* and *Batman Returns*, designed the limited edition kit. When the kit's 23 pieces are assembled, the one-inch-scale scene will cover an area 15 x 15 x 11 inches. The kit comes with a fine art print of Wrightson's original concept drawing and an extensive painting guide.

Sculptor Dan Platt added the third dimension to Wrightson's vision.



Jedi Masterwork

Luke Skywalker had to travel to the swamps of Dagobah to find the mystical hermit Yoda, but your search will be a little easier — you won't even have to use the Force. That's because Illusive Concepts, in coop-



eration with Lucasfilm, has created the ultimate *Star Wars* collectible. The itinerant Jedi Master is now available in a life-sized reproduction (life-sized for the mysterious little alien, that is). Painstakingly crafted from the original Yoda in the Lucasfilm archives, this limited edition replica stands 26" tall. The foam-filled figure is

Collectibles

molded from latex and garbed in an all-wool costume that has been hand-tarnished to give the prophet's robe a worn and weathered look. Yoda carries his gnarled walking stick atop a finished wooden base which bears an individually numbered brass plaque. Lucasfilm has limited the manufacture of this item to only 9,500 pieces, so collectors should act quickly. They are available from 800 Trekker and similar outlets. One particularly pleasant aspect of this artifact is that if you buy one as a gift for a friend, you'll never have to worry about a return of the Jedi.

King of the Killer B's

I've never made the film I wanted to make" said producer/director Roger Corman, whose cult movie classics include *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *X — The Man With the X-Ray Eyes*. "No matter what happens, it never turns out exactly as I hoped." Perhaps that is why Corman has recently expanded his SF empire by turning his hand

Comics

to comic books. Cosmic Comics has launched numerous titles capitalizing on the success of some of the filmmaker's 250 productions. *Death Race 2021* is spun off from *Death Race 2000*, a 1975 pre-*Rocky* movie that Sylvester Stallone would like us to forget, one that took place in a future where drag racers competed by scoring points for running over pedestrians. *Rock and Roll High School* carries on after the movie of the same name and looks ahead to a future educational system in which Beavis and Butthead would feel welcome. *Caged Heat 3000* takes the women-in-prison exploitation theme begun by Corman in his 1973 movie *Caged Heat* and continues it on a remote prison asteroid 45 million light-years from Earth. Based on Corman's track record, his new endeavor should prosper, for he has always been a crowd-pleaser, as per the title of his biography, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime*.

Roger Corman's cult films transform into B movie comics.



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Movie Machine (TDC Interactive), a CD-ROM that will allow you to produce, direct, and edit your own sci-fi adventure movie without moving from your personal computer. You'll be able to sew together the hundreds of SF scenes provided, which you then can replay in your own private screening room. Choose a few Cute Aliens, Blasters, and Explosions, add a helping of Snappy Chatter, Screams, and Words of Wisdom, and top off with Laser Play and UFOs. Once you're finished, sit back and shout "Roll 'em!" The only thing missing will be the smell of popcorn.

For the Science Fiction Fan Who Has Everything

Your bookcases are crammed full of everything from Asimov to Zelazny, each volume lovingly read and carefully catalogued. You've collected the movies, posters, model kits, and even the signed limited editions. What goals are left to conquer? Barry R.

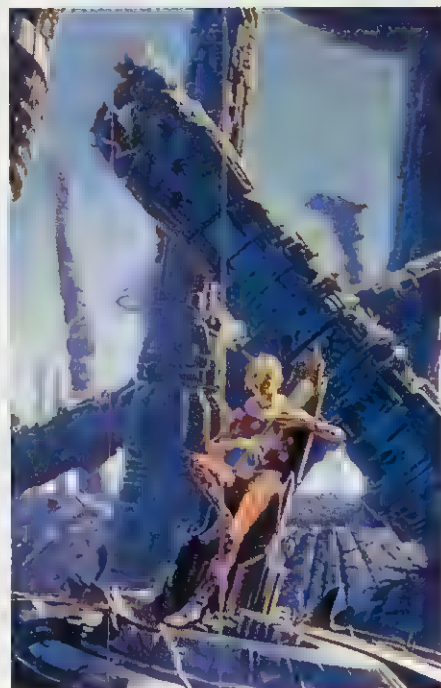
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you back \$1,200. If you've evolved beyond poverty and have \$65,000 to spare, you can become the owner of one of only fourteen known surviving paintings by the Golden Age artist Margaret Brundage. Her portrait of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* (seen in print, at left, for the first time in over half a century) originally appeared on the August 1934 cover of *Weird Tales*. Collectors with an itch to hit a new plateau should pay a visit to Levin's new Santa Monica, CA store or phone for a recent catalog.

SF's Cosmic Rembrandt

Decades ago, card collecting meant images of baseball players in baggy pants wrapped together with inedible chewing gum in waxed paper. Today, the sports market is but one small sub-section of the collectible card industry, and there are enough collections of SF art sets for any fan of the extraterrestrial to build a mini-museum. *Other Worlds*, featuring the artwork of Michael Whelan, who has won more Hugo Awards for Best Professional Artist than any other artist, is a perfect way to build a personal gallery of the best the field has to offer. "Doing a cover painting," Whelan has said, "usually means attempting to distill the most significant aspects of the book into a single image, trying to get the flavor of the whole experience in one picture." As his dazzling book covers have proved, no one does it better. For fifteen years Whelan has set the standard for imagining the alien, practically defining SF the way Kelly Freas did for the '50s. The ninety regular cards in the series feature some of his finest paintings (plus some never-before-seen images) on the front, and personal commentary from the artist on the back.



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MOVIES

By Dan Perez

Mystery Science Theater 3000 moves its cult magic to the big screen.



Mike Nelson and the 'bots are forced to watch and comment on the 1955 classic movie *This Island Earth* in a scene from *Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie*. Below: Reluctant astronaut Mike Nelson with puppet-robots Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot.

FOR THE MINNESOTA-BASED PRODUCTION COMPANY known as Best Brains, Inc., the end of 1995 was literally the best of times and the worst of times. In December, their cable/syndicated cult hit *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (MST3K to throngs of fans across the nation) had just been cancelled by Comedy Central. Which seemed like odd timing, since the cancellation came only a short time after they had completed work on *Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie*, due out from Gramercy Pictures on April 15.

Mystery Science Theater 3000, for those who have missed the television show's seven-year run, features Mike Nelson in the role of reluctant astronaut, um, Mike Nelson. He's trapped aboard a spaceship called the *Satellite of Love* along with his puppet-robot companions Gypsy (Jim Mallon), Tom Servo (Kevin Murphy) and Crow T. Robot (Trace Beaulieu). Mike and the 'bots, forced by evil scientist Dr. Clayton Forrester (Trace Beaulieu) to watch bad movies like *Samson vs. the Vampire Women*, respond to the films with an endless series of wisecracks like, "Bad movie? You're soaking in it!"

The show has weathered some cast changes — popular cast members Joel Hodgson (who also created the show) and Frank Conniff have moved on to other projects — which may have contributed to the cancellation, along with Comedy Central's unhappiness with the show's ratings. "They have decided not to buy any more shows from us," says Jim Mallon, producer of the TV series and director of the movie. He went on to note that Best Brains does plan to take the series elsewhere once

contractual obligations are fulfilled. "We think our mission of straightening out bad movies is ongoing. It's become pretty much a life vocation. If Comedy Central thinks that we can't do anything else for them, that's OK; we'll find somebody else."

Mike Nelson, who is also head writer for the show, adds, "We'll be back, on that television show thing."

Meanwhile, the syndicated version of the show is called *The Mystery Science Theater Hour*, of which Mallon says: "It's on, supposedly, in about fifty percent of the country. It's not, you know, your prime-time fare."

"It's no *Baywatch Nights*," quips Nelson.

"If you're up sick with a fever headache in the middle of the night — two, three in the morning — you might catch it," says Mallon.

Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie was shot for about two million dollars in Minneapolis-St. Paul, during the TV show's 1995 summer hiatus. The shoot wrapped in an amazing four weeks, primarily because two-thirds of the film is set in the *Satellite of Love*'s theater, with only the silhouettes of Nelson, Crow, and Servo against the backdrop of the movie they're watching. The silhouette shooting was completed in only two days, according to Mallon. "We delivered sixty pages of script in two days. That's got to be a Hollywood record. I think we even eclipsed Ed Wood's record on a good day."

The movie "experiment" Mike and the 'bots are forced to watch in *MST3K: The Movie* is *This Island Earth*, a 1955 Universal science fiction film featuring Rex Reason, Faith Domergue and Jeff Morrow. According to Mallon, the movie's plot is "about a scientist who is kidnapped by some large-foreheaded aliens in order to help facilitate their eventual conquest of Earth. By saying that many words I'm giving it a lot more credit than it deserves."

Normally, for the TV show, Best Brains' writing staff watches a movie about seven times, pausing to write jokes as the movie presents opportunities. But writing for the *MST3K: The Movie*, which was accomplished during the television show's normal schedule, required a lot more painstaking work. "It's much more tedious," says Nelson. "It's dwelling on the same material for roughly two years, not that it took us that long to make it, but

we've been dealing with a movie for that long — at least that long. So your interest tends to slip away when you've seen the thing seventy times. With the regular TV show, by the time you abandon [a movie], at least you still have some interest in it."

MST3K: The Movie will feature the usual cast from the television show, with one addition. "We imported only one guy," says Nelson. "It was a process we're very unfamiliar with: casting someone. But John Brady was his name and he plays an alien in it. A very small part, but for this, I think it was a



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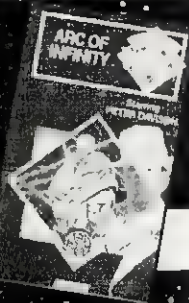
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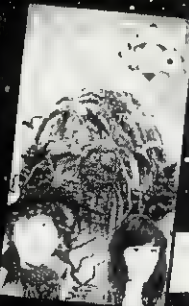
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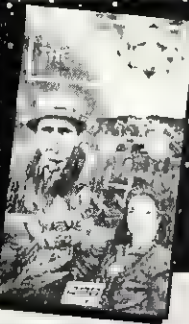
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good idea, because there wasn't anyone who would have been as good as this guy can be. Not that we don't have a very deep bench here at *MST*."

When asked how the movie came about, Mallon says, "We noticed that with the TV series, the more people you got together to watch any individual TV episode, the more fun it seemed to become. So we thought to ourselves, 'where are there a lot of people who would get together and watch this?' and obviously a movie theater comes to mind. That's really the genesis of the film itself."

In addition, Best Brains wanted to build on the success of their *MST3K* live shows (many performed at college campuses and conventions). "That's what really cinched it for us," Mallon says. "Man, we just had a ball. The first live shows we did, the audience could hold 700, and it was just so much fun we did a convention where we had 2,000 people together to watch, and boy, it was just so much fun. We figured, wow, this could be a good thing, but it was really up to a studio to decide if they wanted to take the risk."

The nature of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, where Nelson and the robots "talk back" to the movie screen, leads to speculation that the movie version of the show may spawn a phenomenon similar to that seen at screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, in which audience members shout back at the screen and sing along with the songs. "Actually," says Nelson, "there was some local person who did a story — kind of a small paper — that sort of offhandedly encouraged people to comment during [*MST3K: The Movie*], and we were very frightened. But as it turns out, there's not enough time and people are laughing too much; I think the rest of the audience would be really down on anyone who tried it. You know, there's just no room: hopefully we fill every space with one of the better jokes that could be there."

The "spaces" referred to are stretches of little or no dialogue on the film's soundtrack, which allow Mike and the 'bots to make their jokes. "We've turned down some good movies just for that," Nelson notes. "There's just not enough spaces like that."

When asked how making the movie was different from taping the show, Nelson replied, "The silhouette part wasn't different at all, really. I mean, we were much more rehearsed."

Mallon adds, "The TV show we shoot with a single camera in one afternoon: [that's] the live-action stuff. With the movie we spent thirty days shooting live action, and the camera could be anywhere — it's not a fixed point of view as it is on the TV show. It's more cinematic in that sense."

Audiences can expect expansions of the television sets, but other things will remain basically the same. "The robots are more or less the same," Mallon notes. "They were cleaned up for filming, because you can see so much more detail than TV does."

The robot puppets were one of the more difficult aspects of shooting the movie. "You'd do a take," Nelson says, "and realize you could see the string — well not the string — we actually didn't try to hide those. But you'd see a [puppeteer's] hand or a head."

Mallon adds, "In the TV show we know the sight lines really well, so we know where the puppet can be, and we can be, without being seen. In the movie, since you're putting the camera anywhere, it often got frustrating to realize 'well, there's the perfect shot — that's where everybody needs to be — oh, there's Trace's head. We'd have to remove Trace's head and sew it back on.'"

According to Nelson, the producers "insisted that I say 'All righty then' a whole lot because that Jim Carrey thing is so hot — it was a bit of a strain. I'm just teasing. We've kind of got Jim Carrey fever around here."

Mallon says, "I think a movie is a lot different than a TV show. For me, the weirdest thing is coming to a dirty warehouse in St. Paul which has just been converted to a movie production facility. You're out there every morning at six a.m. You go in and there's a guy behind a counter with a little grill and he makes you up eggs. Everyone is shaking off sleep from the three or four hours of sleep they got. It gets real weird after a while."

"It's also part of what's really fun about making a movie. Sort of like being in a summer camp: all your normal rules of day-to-day life don't really apply any more. It was ultimately a lot of fun."

Mystery Science Theater 3000 is well-known among its fans, who refer to themselves as *MSTies*, for its use of in-jokes and references to previously riffed movies (one of the most famous of which is the wonderfully wretched *Manos, the Hands of Fate*). Will dyed-in-the-wool *MSTies* get a glimpse of Torgo, the shambling, diabolical servant from *Manos* in *MST3K: The Movie*?

"No," reports Nelson. "You know, we realized — actually the studio forced us to realize — no, I'm kidding, but they wanted to get a wider audience. Actually there is a *Manos* joke in the movie, but those references tend to be veiled. They want to hit a wide audience, so we've broadened it a little, and hopefully kept the appeal for the normal fans."

Are there plans for more *Mystery Science Theater 3000* movies? "Sure," Mallon says. "I think very few humans on the planet would kick away a multiple film deal. It's a rare kind of lifestyle, it's highly flattering, and I think we'd be fools for not doing a string of them. But it's such a high risk business. We consider ourselves blessed just having had the experience of making one. If the film gods let us do more than one, then it's quite remarkable."

As the interview concludes, Nelson voices his confidence in the movie: "We're going to outperform that little dinosaur movie, *Jurassic Park*, I think. I feel it." When asked if the *MST3K* movie has computer generated dinosaurs, the comedian pauses for a beat and says, "Yeah. Yeah, we do." □

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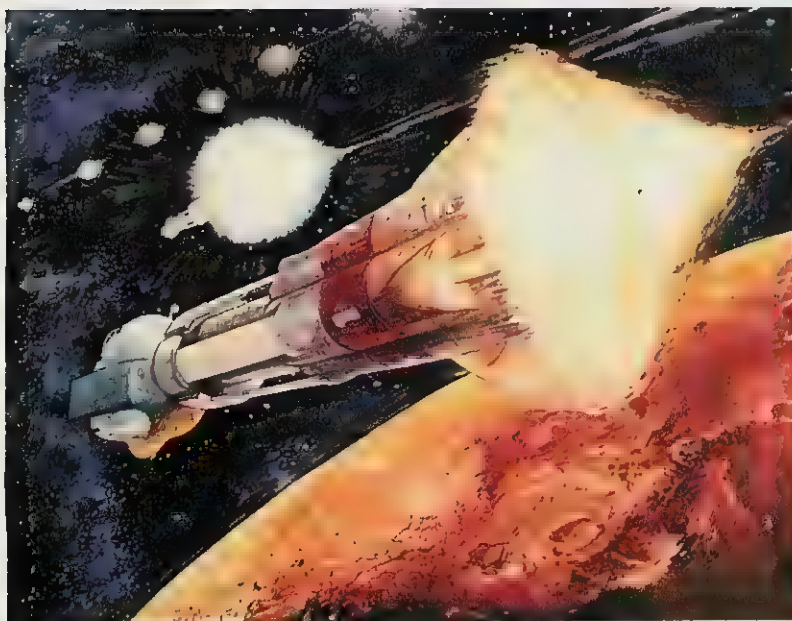
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The energy to power tomorrow's cities will soon be wrested from the heart of the atom. Art by Web Bryant. BELOW: A low-yield nuclear explosion is fusion at its fiercest.

UNLIMITED ENERGY — CHEAP, PLENTIFUL, AND with no unpleasant side effects. That has been the dream of scientists and science fiction writers alike. Advances in humanity's knowledge of fusion and fission energy technology will eventually bring us to this goal. Examining our progress along this path are two working scientists and SF writers. Doug Beason worked for the President's Science Adviser on the White House Staff under both Bush and Clinton. He was recently the director of Faculty Research at the USAF Academy in Colorado Springs. He is a Nebula-nominated author, and his latest of nine novels, *Ignition* (written with Kevin J. Anderson), will soon be a major motion picture. Charles Sheffield is chief scientist of Earth Satellite Corporation, and the author of best-selling books of both science fact and science fiction. Before coming to the United States, he worked on core design and shielding problems of commercial nuclear power reactors. His most recent novels are *Proteus in the Underworld* and *The Ganymede Club*.

SHEFFIELD: The traditional forms of energy, the ones that people have been using since we tamed fire, have all relied on chemical energy, which involves the electrons that surround atoms. Then, about a hundred years ago, people discovered you could get energy from the nucleus of an atom. You can get it in two different ways. You can take a big, heavy atom like uranium and split it up into smaller atoms; or you can take very light atoms, like hydrogen, and combine them to make heavier atoms like helium. And those two forms are known

respectively as nuclear fission and nuclear fusion. You can get energy by splitting atoms to make lighter atoms until you get down in mass to iron. When you get to iron, you find you have to go the other way around — you have to *combine* atoms and make them heavier, releasing energy, until you get up to iron. So iron sits as a sort of watershed. If an element is lighter than iron, and you're trying to get nuclear energy from it, you are dealing with fusion. If an atom is heavier than iron, and you want to get energy from it, you're dealing with fission. That's the basic difference between the two.

And, in fact, fusion energy is already found in two places that we know of. Stars operate and give off heat because they have a fusion process going on within them. And hydrogen bombs employ a fusion process. At the moment, though, we don't have any proven, guaranteed way of generating energy on Earth from fusion — discounting hydrogen bombs, which have certain disadvantages as an energy source.

BEASON: When you say a proven and guaranteed way of producing fusion, I think what Charles is saying is that we don't have a way that is robust, in the sense of how we successfully control fission energy in a nuclear reactor. That's one of the goals of fusion energy: to produce fusion in the laboratory. There are two basic ways that we can do this. The first way is to create a super high density with a low temperature. That is known as inertial confinement fusion, or ICF. People normally take some kind of fusion fuel, like deuterium-tritium, and implode it by various mechanisms, be it lasers or particle beams or high explosives—that's the way that hydrogen bombs work. You can use lasers or particle beams to create a very small explosion in the laboratory. People are on the verge of creating the conditions necessary to make this work. The other way is to create an extremely high temperature at a low density. That's known as magnetic fusion.

One example is the ITER, that is, the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, which is a tokamak being built by a consortium of European nations, the United States, Japan, and Russia.

These nations are building a demonstration model of tokamak, a magnetic bottle that can hold plasma, which is the fourth state of energy. Plasma is a gas that is highly heated, so much so that the gases' electrons are ripped away from the protons and neutrons. The magnetic bottle is necessary so that this plasma can be contained for a very long time, on the order of seconds, at extremely high temperatures, on the order of millions of degrees centigrade. So those are the two ways to produce fusion in the laboratory. Either by imploding things by ICF and creating an explosion—a miniature hydrogen bomb, but on the order of pounds of explosion instead of megatons of explosion—versus magnetic fusion, which is being done in these huge machines called tokamaks that magneti-



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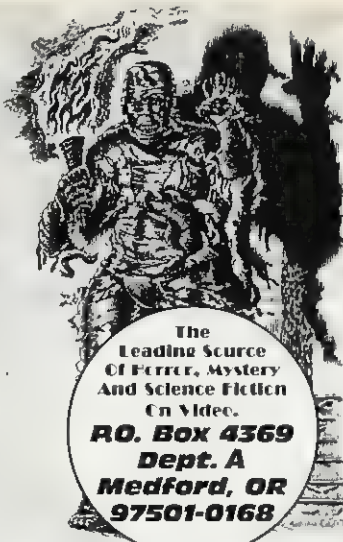
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SKY RACKET (1937) Herman Brix, Joan Barclay, Jack Mulhall. An extremely rare crime thriller with definite sci-fi elements. Brix plays an undercover agent out to capture a gang of airmail bandits who use a death ray device to blow airplanes out of the sky. Similar to AIR HAWKS. From Sam Katzman's Victory Pictures. From 16mm. \$194

THE LOST MISSILE (1958) Robert Loggia, Ellen Parker, Larry Kerr. A strange and deadly missile from outer space circles the Earth at low altitude, destroying everything in its path. The city of Ottawa is wiped out and the flaming radioactive menace is headed toward New York. An interesting and very obscure '50s sci-fi thriller. From 16mm. \$195



THE SLIME PEOPLE (1963) Susan Hall, Robert Hutton, Les Tremayne. Monstrous prehistoric creatures, disturbed by nuclear tests, take over Los Angeles under cover of a wall of strange mist. A small group of people do battle with them. From 35mm. \$196

2+5: MISSION HYDRA (1968) Kirk Morris, Gordon Mitchell, Leontine Snell. One of the rarest of all '60s sci-fi films. An alien spaceship from the planet Hydra lands on Earth and kidnaps a group of humans. Hibernating robots, aliens with incinerating rays, photon showers, a planet of ape-monsters, and a spaceship of skeletons are all featured. Color, from 16mm. \$197

KING OF KONG ISLAND (1968) Brad Harris, Marc Lawrence. A group of mad scientists journey to Kong Island where they implant receptors into the brains of gorillas. They plan to control the world with an army of Kong! The scientists are challenged by the mighty ape, "King", an actual descendant of King Kong. Color, 16mm. \$198

IT'S ALIVE (1968) Tommy Kirk, Shirley Bonne, Bill Thurman. A real gagster that's sooo much fun to watch. A maniacal farmer kidnaps local passersby and feeds them to his cave-dwelling lizard man that lives in a cave beneath his farm. The ping pong ball-eyed monster is a scream. Amazing. Directed by Larry Buchanan. From 16mm. \$199

SUPERSONIC MAN (1979) Michael Coby, Cameron Mitchell, Diana Polakov. An obscure Italian sci-fi adventure complete with a superhero from a distant galaxy. Mitchell is great as the evil mad scientist. Watch for the rocket-shooting robot. Color, 16mm. \$200

HORROR

TORTURE SHIP (1939) Irving Pichel, Lyle Talbot, Jacqueline Wells. A crazy scientist is conducting crazy experiments pertaining to "the criminal mind" on board his private ship. His guinea pigs are real criminals! Subdued horror elements but still interesting. 16mm. H230

MURDER IN THE MIRROR (1960) Lon Chaney, directed by Curt Siodmak. FIRST TIME ON VIDEO! Here's something you probably never thought you'd see: a lost episode of the Chaney TV series, 13 DEMON STREET. Lon (in spooky makeup) plays the ghostly host for this suspenseful ghost story about a man who sees a vision of an ages-old murder within a mysterious mirror. Very creepy, and an absolute must for any collector of rare horror oddities. (Our thanks to Mike McHenry for finding this gem for us). Plus! Also thrown in is a full reel of ultra-rare BELIEVE IT OR NOT vignettes—also first time on video. This tape is highly recommended. From 35mm. H231

BLANCHEVILLE MONSTER (1963, also HORROR) Gerard Tichy, Leo Anchoriz, Joan Mills, Richard Davis, Heiga Line. A beautiful young girl—daughter of a half-mad count—fears that her life will be sacrificed to fulfill an ancient family legend. She later finds her... If buried prematurely by her disfigured father. From 16mm. H217

HONEYMOON OF HORROR (1964) Robert Parsons, Abbey Heller. An incredible rarity! The new bride of a strange sculptor finds her new life filled with horror. It seems many of her husband's friends want her dead. But why? And what is the mysterious connection with a series of unusual statues? Color, from 16mm. H218

FORTRESS OF THE DEAD (1965) John Hackett, Conrad Parkham, Ana Corita. An incredibly rare ghost thriller. The lone survivor of a blown out WWII bunker at Corregidor returns to the Philippines twenty years later. There he finds himself haunted by the ghosts of his former battalion. Very eerie. From 16mm. H219



MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND (1968) John Ashley, Ronald Remy, Angeliqne Pettyjohn. Great '60s drive-in fun about a mad scientist who conducts strange experiments dealing with eternal youth. A hideous green monster eventually causes the doctor's laboratory to go up in flames. Eddie Romero. Color, 16mm. H220

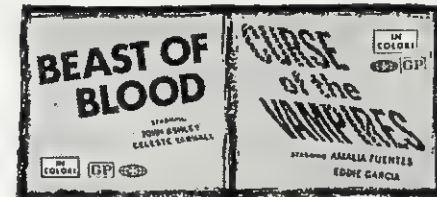
BEAST OF BLOOD (1970 aka BEAST OF THE DEAD) John Ashley, Celeste Yarnall Eddie Garcia. Sequel to MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND. The maniacal Dr. Lorca kidnaps a female reporter for use in his experiments. He eventually brings a headless monster (with green blood, no less) back to life. Color, from 16mm. H221

CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES (1970 aka CREATURES OF EVIL) Amalia Fuentes, Eddie Garcia, Romeo Vasquez. A brother and sister arrive at their father's estate only to find their mother has become a bloodthirsty vampire. Her son eventually feels her fangs on his neck. Similar to VAMPIRE PEOPLE. Color, from 16mm. H222

IT'S ALIVE (1968) Tommy Kirk, Shirley Bonne, Bill Thurman. A real gagster that's sooo much fun to watch. A maniacal farmer kidnaps local passersby and feeds them to his cave-dwelling lizard man that lives in a cave beneath his farm. The ping pong ball-eyed monster is a scream. Amazing. Directed by Larry Buchanan. From 16mm. \$199

KISS OF THE TARANTULA (1972) Eric Mason, Suzanne Ling, Pat Landon, Herman Wallner. Good old fashioned '70s drive-in schlock. A wacky teenage girl unleashes her pet tarantulas against her bitchy stepmother and other "enemies." Over the top, but fun. Color. H224

RETURN OF THE ZOMBIES (1972 aka THE HANGING WOMAN) Paul Naschy, Stan Cooper, Vickie Nesbitt. A man finds the corpse of a young woman hanging in a cemetery. As he investigates, he uncovers a local doctor's plans to zombie the entire world. Quite chilling once the zombies are out in force. Rated "R." Color, from 35mm. H225



HOUSE OF EXORCISM (1972) Eika Sommer, Telly Savalas, Robert Alda. Directed by Mario Bava. Eika finds herself in an eerie mansion filled with weird characters (including Savalas as a butler who resembles a painting of the devil) and putrefying corpses. Alda is the priest who tries to exorcise her. Rated "R." Color, from 16mm. H226

THE DEVIL'S POSSESSED (1974) Paul Naschy, Norma Sebba. A middle aged tyrant commits unpeakable acts of evil and torture against his subjects. They eventually rise up and fulfill a horrific revenge against him. Beautiful color, from 35mm. H227

EXORCISM (1974) Paul Naschy, Maria Perschy, Maria Kosti, Grace Mills. A strange satanic cult is on the loose in the English countryside. They commit a series of gruesome crimes that leave the local authorities baffled. Rated "R." Color, from 16mm. H228

INQUISITION (1976) Paul Naschy, Daniela Giordano, Juan Gallardo. Naschy is a 16th century witch hunting judge. He falls in love with the daughter of a warlock whom he sentenced to death. She makes a pact with Satan and soon Naschy finds himself accused of witchcraft. This is a violent film with many brutal torture scenes. Not recommended for children. Definitely rated "R." Color, 35mm. H229

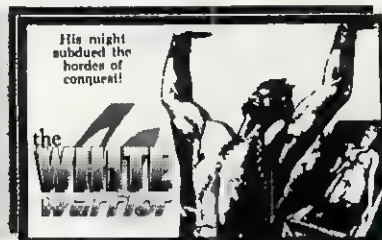
SWORD AND SANDAL

GOLGOTHA (1935) Jean Gabin, Edwige Feuillere, Harry Baur. This highly heralded spectacle film from France centers around the time period of Jesus of Nazareth. Extremely well done for its time and highly recommended. Dubbed and from 16mm. \$579

THE WHITE WARRIOR (1961) Steve Reeves, Giorgia Moll, Renato Baldini. One of the most sought-after sword and sandal spectacles is now on video! The setting is Russia during the 1800s. Reeves plays a courageous tribal chieftan who defies the Czar and leads his men against the monarch's advancing hordes. An absolute must for all Steve Reeves fans. Directed by cult Italian director, Riccardo Freda. Color, from a beautiful 16mm print \$586

ROMULUS AND REMUS (1951) Steve Reeves, Gordon Scott, Verna Lili. Two brothers, raised by a wolf, grow up and fight side by side until they both come to desire the daughter of the King of the Sabines. The climax features the brother's duel to the death, with the rise of the Roman Empire serving as an epilog. Highly recommended. From a stunning color 16mm print. Fully letter-boxed in cinemascopy. \$580

VULCAN, SON OF JUPITER (1962) Rod Flash Ilush, Bella Cortez, Gordon Mitchell. Lots of horror and fantasy elements here! The Greek gods of Mt. Olympus, lizard-like monster men, and strange underground creatures are featured in this incredibly rare sword and sandal spectacular. Color, from 16mm. \$581



SON OF HERCULES IN THE LAND OF DARKNESS (1963) Dan Vadis, Carl Brown. Argolis, son of Hercules, rescues peasants held in slavery by the evil Queen of Dem. He also loosens a sea of molten lava that destroys her ancient city. Color, from 16mm. \$582

INVINCIBLE BROTHERS MACISTE (1965) Richard Lloyd, Tony Freeman, Calude Lange. A mysterious underground queen orders her hordes of leopard-men to kidnap the fiancée of a prince—whom she actually loves—hoping to draw him to her underground kingdom. The Maciste brothers come to the rescue. Color, from 16mm. \$583

KNIVES OF THE AVENGER (1967) Cameron Mitchell, Elissa Mitchell, Fausto Tozzi. Directed by Mario Bava. Vikings battle each other, pillage the countryside, and decapitate their enemies. Bava's follow-up to ERIK THE CONQUEROR. Color, from 16mm. \$584

ARABIAN ADVENTURE (1979) Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Mickey Rooney. Lee plays an evil magician who seeks to become all powerful by obtaining a magical rose. This wonderful sword and sorcery fantasy features flying carpets, a malevolent genie, dragon monsters, etc. Very entertaining. In color and from 16mm. \$585

EXPLOITATION

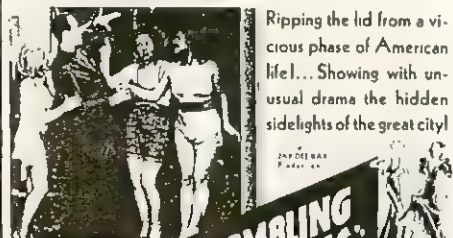
DAMAGED LIVES (1933) Dane Sinclair, Lyman Williams, George Irving, Jason Robards. A guy breaks a date with his fiancée and finds himself having an affair with another woman. The next day he confesses everything to his beloved. There's just one problem: the woman he slept with had V.D. A camp classic. From 16mm. X086

GAMBLING WITH SOULS (1936) Martha Chapin, Wheeler Oakman, Bryant Washburn, Gay Sheridan, Robert Frazer. Innocent girls are "sucked" into a gambling and prostitution house in this extremely campy exploitation classic. From 16mm. X087

REBELLIOUS DAUGHTERS (1938) Marjorie Reynolds, Verna Hillie, Dennis Moore, Monte Blue. A small town girl—ignored by her parents—moves out and takes a job at a dress shop. Unknown to her, her boss is taking compromising pictures of rich women in dressing rooms, doctored them, then using them for blackmail! 16mm. X088

NO GREATER SIN (1942) Leon Ames, Luana Walters, John Gallaudet, Guy Usher, Tris Coffin. Another "lost" exploitation baddie has finally floated to the surface. A concerned health official does everything he can to stop the spread of venereal disease by the town's prostitutes. Will he succeed? A campy morsel. From 16mm. X085

A FIG LEAF FOR EVE (1944 aka **DESIRABLE LADY**) Jan Wiley, Phil Warren, Betty Blythe. An exotic dancer is thrown in the slammer for performing a risqué dance in public. Later, she discovers her boss set up the raid for publicity! First time on video. From 16mm. X090



Ripping the lid from a vicious phase of American life... Showing with unusual drama the hidden sidelights of the great city!

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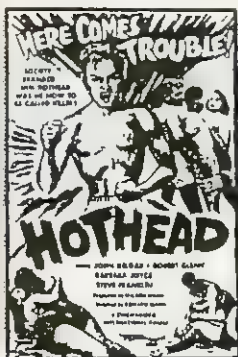


JUVENILE SCHLOCK

MICKEY (1948) Lois Butler, Bill Goodwin, Irene Hervey, John Sutton, Rose Hobart, Skip Homeier. Earthy, sometimes humorous early teenage movie about a young teenager who's a source of constant embarrassment to her widower father. She eventually straightens out and becomes a gorgeous young gal, helping Dad along the way. Kind of a '40s version of GIDGET. Color, 16mm. JS36

SO EVIL, SO YOUNG (1957) Jill Ireland, John Charlesworth, Ellen Pollock, John Longden. A juvenile girl is framed as an accomplice in a robbery. She's sent to a reform school for girls where she falls victim to the cruel lempement of the sadistic chief warden. A real J.D. rarity that's first time on video. Color, from 16mm. JS37

IVY LEAGUE KILLERS (1962) Don Borissonko, Barbara Brucker. A totally forgotten minor J.D. gem. A group of rich teenagers find themselves up against a ruthless motorcycle gang. One thing leads to another, finally culminating in robbery and murder. Gritty, yet sincere. Try finding this in any J.D. reference book. From 16mm. JS38



HOTHEAD (1963) John Delgar, Robert Glenn, Barbara Joyce. A must-see for all J.D. collectors! A young teenage punk is fired from his job for stealing. A gorgeous young hooker gets involved with a runaway husband. Ultimately, they all cross paths in this very unusual and very engrossing film. Prostitution, alcoholism, cool cars, body builders, dancing teenage girls, fist-fights, and even madness are all part of this incredible J.D. rarity. A real find. From 16mm. JS39

JUNGLE THRILLS

KING OF THE WILD (1931) Boris Karloff, Walter Miller, Nora Lane Dorothy Christy. Boris plays a villainous sheik in this exciting Mascot serial thriller that's filled with man-eating tigers, volcanoes, and other jungle thrills. From 16mm. 12 chapter serial, two tapes, \$24.95 plus \$2.05 for packaging, handling, and postage. J049

BRIDES OF SULU (1934) Adelina Moreno, Eduardo Castro, Gregoria Tiernan. Two island lovers—both of opposing religions—fall in love and flee to a remote island. Warriors from the girl's tribe track them down and trouble follows. From 16mm. J050

PERILS OF THE JUNGLE (1951) Clyde Beatty, Stanley Farrar, Phyllis Coates. This good old fashioned "B" jungle thriller has famed African hunter Beatty tracking down Nubian lions in the Congo jungle. Plenty of hair-raising back-bush excitement. From 16mm. J051

WALK INTO HELL (1957) Cnips Rafferty, Françoise Christopher, Reginald Lyne. An Australian official of New Guinea is ordered to investigate an oil discovery in the wild jungle interior. When he and his party are captured by savages, he effects their freedom by having a lady doctor cure the jungle chieftan's children. Color, 16mm. J052

KILMA, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE (1975) Eva Miller, Frank Brann, Claudia Gravy. A shipwrecked sailor witnesses a battle between natives and female amazon warriors. Later, the sailor befriends the Amazon queen of the after saving her from a boi constrictor. Lots of jungle thrills and scantily-clad Amazon gals. Color, from 16mm. J053

EDGAR & BRYAN WALLACE



RETURN OF THE FROG (1938 aka **NOBODY HOME**) Sonnie Hale, Wilfred Lawson, Louise Henry. An ultra-rare British Edgar Wallace chiller. The ex-partner of a master criminal is protected by Scotland Yard. The criminal—a master of disguise—tracks him down and kills him anyway, in spite of the Yard's efforts. EW15

HYENA OF LONDON (1964) Bernard Price, Diana Martin, Tony Kendall, Anthony Wright. This is an extremely interesting Edgar Wallace horror chiller with sci-fi elements. A mad professor, studying the "symptoms of evil", injects liquid from the brain of a dead killer into his own brain and becomes a maniac himself. 16mm. EW16

ROOM 13 (1964) Joachim Fuchberger, Karin Dor, Richard Haubler. A robbery involving gold and bank notes eventually leads to the blackmail of a government official. It all leads to a forsaken castle and a nightclub room known as "number 13." From 16mm. EW17

CURSE OF THE HIDDEN VAULT (1964) Judith Dornys, Harold Lieb. The aged owner of an old gambling casino dies, making a young girl heir to his amassed fortune that lies hidden in a secret tomb. Underworld members become the victims of greed—and the dead secret of the mysterious vault. From 16mm. EW18

FORGOTTEN HORRORS

PLEASE NOTE: All titles in this section are just \$12.95, plus \$2.05 per title for packaging, handling, and postage.

MURDER AT DAWN (1932) Jack Muhall, Josephine Dunn, Mischa Auer. In a mysterious mountain hideaway, a mad professor works on a death ray! Lots of murders and mysterious goings-on ensue, complete with trap doors, faces at windows, falling bodies, etc. Special effects by electrical wizard Kenneth Strickfaden. 16mm. FH51

GANGSTERS OF THE SEA (1932 aka **OUT OF SINGAPORE**) Noah Beery, Dorothy Burgess, Minam Seegar, Montague Love. Strange happenings as the captain of a ship falls ill with some strange disease (he's actually been poisoned). A gang of thugs then tries to take over the ship. A very very explosive climax. From 16mm. FH52

THE INTRUDER (1933) Monte Blue, Lila Lee, Gwenn Lee, Mischa Auer. A grisly murder is committed on board a cruise ship just before it goes down in a storm. The survivors land on a mysterious jungle island where they encounter a fanatical wild man, a killer gorilla, and a cave full of skeletons! Bizarre. Recommended From 16mm. FH53

CAPTURED IN CHINATOWN (1935) Charles Delaney, Marion Shilling. A "yellow peril" thriller. A bloody feud between two Chinese families leads to mystery and murder. Although this is not a new release, it is now upgraded from a beautiful 16mm original print. FH27



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Also starring Denis Price. Based on the novels by STEPHEN POTTER. Original Screen Adaptation by PETER USTONOV. Produced by Paul E. Chester. Directed by Robert Hamer. Screenplay by Patricia Mayes & Paul Chester. A Gaudemini Film Production. A Continental Distributing Inc. Release

MYSTERY-SUSPENSE-FILM NOIR

PLEASE NOTE: All titles in this section are just \$12.95, plus \$2.05 per title for packaging, handling, and postage.

NEVER TOO LATE (1935) Richard Talmadge, Thelma White, Robert Frazer, Mildred Harris. A wild Talmadge action film involving a stolen necklace and a gang of ruthless jewel thieves. Watch for the rooftop race with the crooks at the film's harrowing climax. Plenty of bruises and abrasions. A Reliable Pictures release. 16mm. M242

STEP ON IT (1936) Richard Talmadge, Lois Wilde, Roger Williams. An action packed Talmadge vehicle with Richard playing a cop-fired from the force—who then solves a series of truck holdups. Tons of fishcuffs. Released by Reliable Pictures. From 16mm. M243

IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED, BUT IT DID (1936) Reginald Denny, Jack La Rue, Evelyn Brent, Inez Courtney. Murder-mystery playwright tries to solve the puzzling case of his murdered producers. A well-done little Chesterfield whodunnit. From 16mm. M244

THE DRAG-NET (1936) Rod La Rocque, Marian Nixon, Betty Compson, Jack Adair. A very rare and very intriguing crime drama produced by Edgar Rice Burroughs. La Rocque plays a young playboy who takes a job as an assistant D.A. He then finds himself up against a tough crime boss and his gang, as well as being at odds with the local newspaper. Recommended From 16mm. M246

THE AVENGING HAND (1936) Noah Berry, Kathleen Kelly, Louis Borell, James Harcourt. Berry went abroad to star in this very rare British thriller. A number of "guests" in a hotel are actually criminals searching for a stash of hidden loot. From 16mm. M247

FLYING FISTS (1937) Herman Brix, Jeanne Martel, Fuzzy Knight, J. Farrell Mac Donald, Gunn Williams, Dickie Jones. This is a nifty little action thriller with Brix as a lumberjack who floors the ex-heavyweight champ. He's brought into the fight game where he's publicized as the most ruthless fighter in the game. Is a fixed fight in the making? Yep. Made by Sam Katzman's Victory Pictures. From 16mm. M248



DESPERATE CARGO (1941) Ralph Byrd, Carol Hughes, Jack Muhall. A gang of criminals hijack a giant clipper on which two girls are trying to return to the United States. Byrd comes to the rescue in this exciting little PRC thriller. From 16mm. M249

THEY MADE ME A KILLER (1946) Robert Lowery, Barbara Britton, Frank Albertson, Lola Lane, James Bush, Edmund MacDonald. In this action-melodrama from Paramount's Pine-Thomas factory, an innocent man (Lowery) is accused of robbery and murder charges. To the rescue comes a determined young girl. From 16mm. M250

MAN ON THE LEDGE (1955) Cameron Mitchell, William Gargan, Sylvia Sydney, Vera Miles. A mentally and emotionally disturbed young man, determined to end his life, contemplates suicide for fourteen hours on a high ledge. A suspenseful and exciting film. 16mm. M261

TIMELOCK (1957) Robert Beatty, Betty McDowell, Lee Patterson. A banker's son is accidentally locked in an air-tight vault that's not set to open again for over 60 hours. It's a life-and-death race against time to save the boy's life in this great British thriller. From 16mm. M253

SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS (1960) Terry-Thomas, Alastair SIM, Ian Carmichael, Janette Scott. This movie's a scream. Carmichael is a total nerd, a complete loser. He's scorned by his employees, cheated by waiters and cab drivers, swindled by crooked car salesmen, and—eventually—totally annihilated at tennis in front of the lady he loves by a smooth-talking ladies man. Then he finds the solution: a school for scoundrels. It's a school to sharpen up men who consistently find themselves lowest on the totem-pole of life. What follows after he "graduates" is a riot. British comedies don't get any better. While only marginally in the Sinister Cinema spectrum, we just couldn't resist releasing this great title. Recommended \$12.95 plus \$2.05 for packaging, handling, and postage. 16mm. M255

MARTIAL ARTS THRILLERS

TNT JACKSON (1974) Jeanne Bell, Stan Shaw, Pat Anderson, Ken Metcalf. A well-made Filipino martial arts thriller with a lot of kick. Former playmate Bell plays a karate expert who kicks the hell out of anyone who tries to prevent her from finding her lost brother. One eye-opening scene has her taking on a room full of thugs while dressed only in panties (very small panties). Definitely rated "R" for nudity, violence, and language. Color, from 16mm. KF07

BRUCE LEE: THE MAN, THE MYTH (1977) Bruce Li. This action bio concerns the saga of Bruce Lee, starting with his humble beginnings in Hong Kong. It follows his life to America and to his eventual stardom as a martial arts superstar. Color, 16mm. KF08

KUNG FU OF EIGHT DRUNKARDS (1977) Lee Yang. A very unusual Kung Fu movie. A group of battling Ching dynasty warriors use an unusual martial arts technique that gives them the appearance of being drunk. Color, from 35mm. KF08

THE TONG FATHER (1978) Sammy Chung. The title character is a merciless oriental crime boss who heads a Chinese opium ring. A martial arts agent sets out to bring him in. Color, from 35mm. KF09

SHEFFIELD: One of the discouraging things about this is that people have been trying to do fusion for at least forty years, probably fifty years, and there has almost always been a prophecy that fusion will become commercial, in the sense that you get more energy out than you put in, in ten years time. The trouble is that ten years seems to be a constantly moving ten years. It's always ten years from *now*.

SHEFFIELD: Which means that if that were to continue to be true, ten years from now, we would be beyond break-even.

BEASON: Just break-even. But that doesn't mean that we'll have a working fusion reactor. Because that's a difficult engineering

SHEFFIELD: I think, however, when someone can demonstrate real energy production — getting more out than you put in — the level of commercial interest will go up enormously. At the moment, commercial groups are somewhat jaundiced, because they've seen these statements from the fusion community for so many years that success is just around the corner. If someone could say, 'here, take this away, and watch it produce more power for you than you put in for a few months or a year,' at that point the electric utilities will have a very different attitude.

SHEFFIELD: The industry also has a long enough memory to recall when fission reactors—uranium and plutonium reactors—were supposed to produce inexhaustible clean electricity that would be too cheap to meter. That seems like dreams of a distant past. The danger is that when fusion devices come online they'll have problems we haven't

Let's return to the confinement devices. In the confinement device, you have to establish a strong field to hold the plasma, and you've got to get the plasma hot enough. If you heat up something hot enough, the particles move fast enough that they overcome their natural repulsion, and when they get close enough together they can then operate with the strong nuclear force and fuse. The reason you need the really, really high temperature is that you're simply using the kinetic energy of one particle approaching another. If they approach each other fast enough and hard enough, before they can bounce away they're within the range at which they can fuse. There are other ways of doing that, but the conventional fusion (I will call it conventional fusion to distinguish it from cold fusion, which by the way comes in two sorts) is simulating extreme conditions, conditions which as Doug said you'd find normally in the center of a star. One way is just to make the plasma sit there and make it hotter and hotter. The other way is to use an implosion technique, which was proposed by Project Daedalus, to fuse deuterium (which is heavy hydrogen) and Helium 3.

BEASON: The other scheme in conventional fusion is the ICF, or inertial confinement fusion. The scheme here is to take something like frozen deuterium-tritium and

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Barbara (original Vampirella) Leigh
Allen Handelman
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Tony (Star Hunter) Sassano
Cassanova Gava (Conan)
Dawen Marie & Robyn (MOC Foxes)
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[Hubble Space Telescope]
Special Effects Artist: "Jake" Jacobson
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collapse it, make the density extremely high in a short amount of time at a relatively low temperature. It's like producing a small hydrogen bomb. Instead of megatons, it's on the order of pounds, occurring in a chamber. The major effort going on in the United States right now is at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, which has the largest laser in the world. They are using neodymium YAG glass lasers and will eventually have 192 beams. They are building something called the National Ignition Facility, which over the next ten years will show how we can actually produce break-even fusion in the laboratory. Basically you have many, many laser beams coming in at different angles, symmetrically hitting a very small target (on the order of sub-millimeter) and imploding in a very short time. This implosion causes the fusion reaction to occur. There are also ways to do this with particle beams. Sandia National Laboratories is doing this with light ions. Lawrence Berkley Laboratory is using heavy ions in an accelerator.

All of these different methods of making pellets implode are called drivers. And really the driver is not important. What's important is creating the implosion, so that you can create fusion reaction. The scheme here is that every tenth of a second you can drop a pellet into a chamber, have it zapped by the laser or the particle beam, and have an explosion. A tenth of a second later, drop another one, have another explosion. What happens? Well, look at the explosion by-products. There are neutrons and that type of thing that are released and absorbed by the chamber wall. You have some kind of liquid metal, say sodium, that is flowing on the outside of this that absorbs the heat, and that can drive a steam engine. So, basically, that's what you're doing with the implosion.

SHEFFIELD: It's interesting when you look at who's doing what around the world. The Soviet Union used to be very big on fusion. I suspect that its budget has gone way down. And the fusion budget of this country, which as I recall went as high as \$400 million per year at one time for the Department of Energy, is probably going to drop. Part of that is failure to achieve anticipated results, as Doug said. We're as close as we've ever been, but we're not there yet. The other is the general climate of spending in the government. It may be a cold few years for conventional fusion, in that the large budgets may not exist.

SF AGE: You keep using the word "conventional" fusion. Let's move to cold fusion, which is supposed to release us from all these other problems.

BEASON: I'll just say an introduction and then I'll let Charles talk, because he's been following this. A few years back, in 1989, Pons and Fleischmann were out at the University of Utah. Fleischmann was the elder, quite well-known and a very respected scientist. They were both chemists. They had some results in which they decided to make a simultaneous announcement to the scientific

field and *The New York Times*. You normally don't do that. What you do is put it up for peer review. It comes out in a journal. And then you hold a press conference. But there are a lot of stories too about how they were really pressured by the university to go ahead and move on this. Because the university had all these visions of big bucks rolling into the University of Utah. But be that as it may. This really ignited, so to speak, the imagination of many. Everyone thought that table-top science was back, and we no longer needed teams consisting of thousands of people spending millions of dollars to produce breakthroughs. The 'Thomas Edisons' of a hundred years ago were being realized in cold fusion today. Who would not like to have something that you could fit in place of your gas tank that not only costs less, but could give you more power?

SHEFFIELD: Let's back up a bit. They said that you take a beaker of heavy water, and you have a palladium electrode in the beaker. Heavy water is ordinary water with deuterium, which is heavy hydrogen, replacing ordinary hydrogen in the water. And what they said was going on is that palladium, as was well-known, will absorb lots and lots of hydrogen. First of all, the water dissociates into heavy hydrogen and ordinary oxygen. The heavy hydrogen migrates to the palladium electrode and is absorbed by it. And because the palladium can absorb such a lot of it, you create a very, very high pressure, an electrochemical pressure, inside the palladium. That allows the heavy hydrogen nuclei to approach close enough to initiate fusion. So that was the theory.

BEASON: I think another theory on that is that some of the deuterium was actually absorbed in some of the lattice points of the palladium. And then you had a realignment of the lattice structure which brought deuterium in very close contact. And basically you had the force of the lattice structure keeping them in very close contact, which caused the fusion.

SHEFFIELD: The problem you have with this as an idea is that you can't explain why there are no neutrons, if what is going on is the conventional deuterium-deuterium fusion reaction.

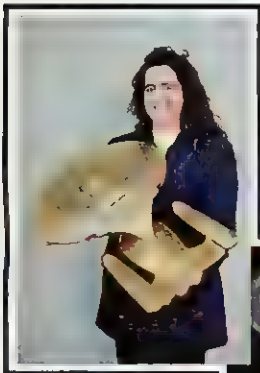
Pons and Fleischmann came up with a press conference, which is a very unconventional way, as Doug said, of announcing a scientific discovery. Normally what you do is you send your preprint paper off with full experimental conditions for other people to verify. You establish priority by sending it to a journal, but you give full details for everybody else to do the same experiments. This was not done. It was treated as a big commercial secret, which it would have been. I believe this was the fault of the administrator at the University of Utah. They thought they were going to have countless billions of dollars coming from this. So nobody was able to duplicate exactly what Pons and Fleischmann did.

Continued on page 95

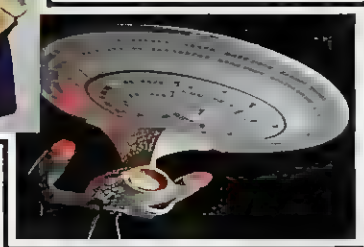


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WHEN CARL AND LIZ AND Marco and me were last off duty on Pallas, we took some abuse from a couple of miners.

That was three months ago; and when I say "on Pallas" of course I mean

inside Pallas, diameter 450 klicks.

We were in the hectic, wittily named Palace Bar in Spintown, the hole inside the big asteroid which was originally melted out by a clean nuke and furnished with a spinning hab. In the outermost zone of the habitat the centrifugal gravity has the same pull as Mars. In the inner zone, where the Palace Bar is, there's lunar gravity, just like back home.

But there's none of the pastel cool and calm of the

wiry black crewcut, sleek smooth skin, and eyelids without much of a fold. Japanese blood in that one's veins. I don't much care for the Japanese. Chip on my lofty shoulder.

Even though we'd swapped our official silvery coveralls for smart synthsilk shirts and slacks with a shimmering moiré effect, obviously we stood out.

Carl tells the redhead sinisterly, "We're in the Space Navy, guarding you all against invading aliens."

Carl forever refers in ominous tones to the alien corpses, as if the very next coffin to come along might contain a live one. More than once he pretended so, when the time came to look inside. ("This one's a cryo casket, folks! The monster's holding a sign. It says in alien: *Please thaw me slowly. Or else.*")

I think when Carl applied to become a ferryman (because Liz was applying, as was I) he might have

FERRYMAN

BY IAN WATSON

Illustration by David Mattingly

Moon in the Palace Bar. Crash Rock music and a naughty holo-disco and fermented fungus Alc to drink, although the bouncers make sure that all customers take detox pills before leaving.

"What are you loonies doing in Pall?" this miner hails us with obstreperous amiability.

He's a squat red-headed hairy fellow who looks as though he ought to shave his hands as well as his cheeks. Accompanying him is a stocky crony with a

been deliberately confronting secret fears, which he felt could best be handled with comic macabre bravado.

Liz is a tease too, though her humor is more subtle. She tells the miners, "Our work is top-secret. We're a high security team."

"You're the garbage detail," sneers the redhead.

His crony chortles. "You drive the big slow hearses. Chug-chug-chug-chug-chuugg." He makes *Ferryman*

3 sound like some terrestrial rustbucket tugboat or tramp steamer.

"I'll have you know, sir," says Marco (loftily), "we can outboost any other ship. We can gyro full circle in the time it takes you to recall who your mother was. We can kill our max velocity faster than anyone. I'm talking gees."

Marco is extremely proud of our specifications; and if any Space Navy actually existed other than in VR thrillers, then the four *Ferryman* craft could fit the bill.

Approximately.

Supposing that real spacecraft carried any weapons — but of course the only armed facility anywhere in Sunspace is Graveyard, where we take all the coffins.

The stocky miner eyes us up and down.

"Jeez," he says. "I'd have thought you lot would snap in half like a bunch of sticks."

So Marco tells him: "My dear sir, thanks to regular workouts in our onboard centrifuge we can take seven gees without blacking."

"Ever had a black eye?" asks the miner. He thinks he's special or he's jealous. Or both.

Iridium (and associated platinum) is the speciality of Pallas. Rare and hard and with a high melting point (which sounds like some glacial VR space-princess). The iridium miners of Pallas are something of a roughneck elite.

"What a waste of our money," this miner grumbles. "We could be quarrying Triton by now, but then I s'pose you'd want to collect your garbage out by Pluto."

"It's Sunspace money, sir, not just yours. And if you fancy that a steel coffin hitting a spaceship at lots of kilometers per second is a desirable prospect, do think again!"

The redhead seems unimpressed.

"Featherbeds for loonies, what a scam. How d'you spend all your weeks of spare time? VR-tripping and shooting the rabbit?"

This puzzles Marco. "What rabbit's that?"

"You know what I mean. Playing at bun-girls and P-boys."

Retro slang is in vogue on Pallas.

Well, of course we do such things! Basically me and Marco are the serious ones, so the two of us make love on board *Ferryman 3* — while Carl and Liz have fun-sex. Marco doesn't particularly regard himself as serious — he just is. OK, so we do shoot the rabbit, rabbits being randy beasts. That wasn't the point.

The point was our Very Important Mission. Since this was being performed pretty flawlessly by ourselves and by the other three *Ferryman* ships, far too many people took us for granted. There ought to be much more *cachet* attached to the job. Respect for the hearse-drivers, if not for the dead aliens. It's true that there's genuine respect in space administration circles. But amongst goofs such as these two miners ... well!

The Japanese-looking one summons an unappealing smile, showing what appears to be a platinum tooth. "I guess," says he, "you'll all be admirers of Norma Notridge."

"Come on," announces Marco, "we're getting out of here. We'll try the Bella Brasserie." The Bella is out in the Mars-grav zone, and a bit exorb. "Maybe the Bella won't have so many horrid little men in it."

If a fight breaks out in the Palace, the bouncers will break it up with puffs of Blandgas, but we didn't want to collect any ugly bruises. Maybe the half-Japanese fellow could do Judo, which might throw us some distance in Moon-grav.

Damned Japanese.

KEY SCREEN, FOR NORMA.

After that furlough on Pallas, I designed a border of leaves to go around the comp's data about her. Sort of midway between an oblong wreath and a crown of laurel.

Norma Notridge (1975 - 2051): founder of the Norma Movement opposed to all genetic manipulation of the human body. The Norma Movement resulted in the Gene-tweak Embargo

Norma didn't want everybody to look the same. On the contrary! Norma was frankly obese, and proud of it. As far as she was concerned, whatever body you're born with is perfect unto itself. Whatever the weight or the height or the appearance, all human bodies are

wonderful, and manipulating bodies by genetic engineering is a crime. She was very persuasive.

On the Moon, due to low gravity, my own generation grew up pretty damn tall. A lanky look seemed set to be the norm. Gangly and lofty.

Then, largely because of Japanese pressure, the Embargo ended. I'm storing my thoughts about this in comp because I believe Norma ought to be re-evaluated. I'm also storing my theories regarding the alien corpses, but never mind about those for the moment.

Originally those Japanese were quite short people. For centuries they lived on a diet of rice and pickles. After the Second Global War last century, they began pigging out on meat and burgers. Rising generations put on a significant number of centimeters, and this only applied more so on the Moon.

Problem! An increase in height would have been OK in any other nation. But the Japanese are very traditional. Living space is measured according to the size of the *tatami* mat. Here's a two-mat room. Here's a three-mat room. Everything in harmonious proportion.

And the traditional size of the mat is based on traditional stature. If you're too tall, that's tough, Tanaka-san. Curl yourself up. Don't just bow. *Stoop*.

As soon as the Embargo ended, the Japanese colonists in Hosi City on the Moon started tweaking genes to breed a more economical, compact, and traditional lunar citizen. A one-mat citizen, instead of one-and-a-quarter.

Whoomph. Serenity and Copernicus and the other colonies soon followed suit. On Luna, bodies would be downsized. Rising generations wouldn't rise nearly so high. While this was going on, my peers and I grew up. And up.

The thing about spaceships is that there isn't usually very much space inside them. Very tall people need not apply. If only the Gene-tweak Embargo had continued! Reassessment of ship dimensions, right? Because the Embargo ended, so much for the caption about me in the Serenity Colony High School yearbook, "Sondra Beidermeier: The Student Most Likely to Go to the Stars"!

Not that anyone was very likely to go to the stars for another century, or maybe another millennium. What we needed was anti-matter technology, not just superfusion. In spite of early gleams of promise star travel continued to elude us.

But instead, the stars came to us — in the shape of coffins. Which was fine by me. The hearse-ships would need to be fairly cavernous — not to carry the coffins inside them, goodness no, those are stored on tiers of magnetized racks underneath the ships — but in case the crews succumbed to melancholy. Gloomy thoughts of close confinement. Premature-burial sort of thoughts. Consequently: ample living space! This could provoke some jealousy in the crews of regular ships, or in asteroid miners.

CARL HAS PERPETRATED A PRANK WHICH ACTUALLY had me fooled for about half a minute.

Marco is captain and ship's systems officer, though we can all do each other's jobs, mostly. Liz and I, with headsets on, operate the drones which we send out to grab the caskets magnetically and haul them back to stick firmly to the racks. Carl is navigator and radar-scanner.

"Coffins, coffins!" Carl announced over the com. "That's odd — I'm getting a very dull echo. My God, these ones are wooden! The aliens have run out of steel. Sondra, Liz: You'll need to use the drones'

claws and suckers

"Just joking," he added half a minute later.

Another notable jape of Carl's was when he claimed to find a ray-gun in one of the coffins instead of the usual speckly stone egg or steel star or statuette or what-not.

En route to Graveyard we routinely open all coffins to check the contents in case there's something new.

We don't personally. A tele-robot does. None of us would want to

climb around the racks for ages in a spacesuit.

The coffins are all of dull steel, lozenge-shaped, over two meters long by a meter deep. Grooves flute the metal decoratively. There's a sharklike tail-fin at the rear. The purpose of this fin must also be ornamental, since it could serve no possible steering function. Ornate clasps hold the lid to the base, and we maneuver the tele-robot to open these clasps, shine a light inside, holograph the contents, then close the lid again and latch it tight.

Checking our catch of coffins is a bit tedious, since there never is anything new, so all four of us take turns.

"Hey," Carl called out on this occasion, "I *think* — it looks like — it is — I've found a gun!" Of course he hadn't.

GRAVEYARD'S BIG. YOU MIGHT SAY IT'S IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE — though at the same time it's very definitely somewhere on account of the huge stack of racks looking like the skeleton of some enormous skyscraper.

When we get within fifty clicks, Graveyard's comp challenges us, and we identify ourselves with our crypto-key so that the laser-zappers don't fire at us. This is always a slightly fraught time.

If anyone ever tries to rob Graveyard, its fusion core will power those lasers ferociously. Routine use of power keeps Graveyard's racks magnetized to hold the coffins in place. That's how the open-mesh skyscraper can have such slim girders, minimizing its mass.

Not many people realize about the mass. How bulky Graveyard would be, if equipped with big clamps or with a vast hull.

Admittedly, as more and more coffins get added by us, the mass increases. In another five years the structure will need extending — unless coffins stop arriving. But anyhow, Graveyard can't simply orbit the Sun the same as Pallas or Ceres and such. If it did, it would be out of line with incoming coffins much of the time. We might need to travel a hundred million miles extra to unload.

This would be no use at all when the four *Ferryman* ships need to follow a regular schedule. One on patrol. One heading for Graveyard, loaded with coffins. One returning. And the fourth being serviced while its crew enjoy liberty on whichever asteroid is nearest, or on marvelous Mars.

Next time it'll be Mars for us! A week's high-boost inward to Graveyard, unload, two weeks inward to Phobos, then shuttle down from the potato moon to Syrtis.

So anyway, Graveyard is drifting in the general direction of Vega, as is the Sun and its family of worlds on its 225-million-year cruise around the galaxy. And every couple of years tugs have to correct Graveyard's vector. Expensive business! Keep mass to the minimum.

Would anyone care to remove a little bit of its mass by stealing a few coffins? Some rogue scientist determined to clone an alien? Villains acting for some billionaire collector of exotica who wants an alien skeleton in his den, and a few stone eggs or medallions?

No one has ever sidled up to us in a bar such as the Palace with an illicit proposal. I mean, we wouldn't agree! We'd be violating our oath. Sooner or later SpaceAdmin would find out, then we'd lose our place in space. Enough lanky loonies would love to take over from us.

To the best of my knowledge no one has shown the least desire to try to clone an alien in some isolated lab in some out-of-the-way asteroid.

They might clone an alien disease. Remember the Trojan Horse. Basically, most people feel considerable resentment at what the Coffin Builders dumped on us.

"COFFINS INCOMING," ANNOUNCES CARL; AND WE'RE BUSY.

A big shoal of thirty coffins, scattered over ten thousand cubic kilometers. Get comp to work out the shortest combination of routes to collar them all. We've plenty of time, but it's the old Traveling Salesman problem. Given thirty cities to visit to sell the new brand of toothpaste or guacamole dip, which is the most economical to go to first, and second, and third, and so forth?

With fuzzy logic and quantum chips, comp copes within an hour or so. Would have taken years, a few decades ago. With a quantum chip, useless answers just cancel out. Sometimes I have a pretty strong intu-

ition which coffins comp will tell us to collect first of all. We used to bet on this, but we gave up because when I have a hunch it's sometimes awesomely right. Not always, but often enough to impress my friends.

And so we set course. Superfusion, and gees.

IT'S ME WHO FINDS THE DAMAGED COFFIN. THE FRONT, stove in. The lid, badly buckled.

And this *is* new. New enough that when I bring it back to the racks we decide we'd better open it right away. The tele-robot has difficulty with the clasps. It can't pry the lid open. I'm sweating as if it's me who's using my own muscles instead of just operating controls. I suppose I'm straining, sort of subconsciously. Heave, heave. Hold on tight to the rack so I don't float away; and heave. Whilst I'm merely strapped in my seat.

All in vain. So I guide the robot to insert a fiber optic. We see confusing swaying fish-eye views. On the adjacent screen, comp builds up a perspective — of two jumbled mangled juve aliens and torn tethers. And a couple of little stone eggs, adrift.

"We have an injured pair!" I exclaim — which is true but rather misleading of me. About five percent of coffins contain juveniles. Always a couple of them in tandem, held one behind another by those durable vermilion tethers, taking up about the same length as an adult.

Oh yes, the adults ... On *Ferryman* we get to see them all the time, but how many people in the solar system can describe one accurately by now, fifteen years after the first corpses started arriving?

Carl often refers to the aliens as "the monsters" but that's partly because mummification in vacuum during eons extracted all water, drawing leathery lips back to expose a predatory snarl of wicked-looking teeth.

Still, they do look rather tough in the brutal sense. Powerfully built bipeds, they would stand as high as any of us of the tall generation. Dehydrated sinews make it seem that they're wearing suits of brown corduroy, though in fact the corpses are naked. I suppose the tethers do look a bit like tentacles, but those merely secure the bodies to rings welded along the insides of the caskets. Without tethers, the bodies could hardly have stayed resting in peace after being accelerated from a mass driver or whatever.

A big ridge of bone runs across each alien's skull from front to back. Three fingers, plus thumb, on each hand. Finger and toe nails are horny claws. The lack of body hair can only have been thanks to a thorough shaving of each corpse, because the autopsies of a few specimens fifteen years ago disclosed abundant roots. Probably ritual purification was the reason for the shaving.

Those autopsies also found retractable genitals within the apparently sexless leathery groins of males. This may imply rutting seasons, when the vulnerable genitals extrude; which seems a bit barbaric.

Rather barbaric, too, are the ritual objects bedded in dried brown glue in a niche in each coffin. A polished granite egg. A steel star with geometrical patterns on it. A medallion with abstract designs. A cone of rock crystal. Take your pick; there isn't much variety.

The crew of *Prospector* vessel which intercepted the first coffins fifteen years ago thought that the stones and cones and steel stars might be coded with data. But that ain't so.

It's as if clever barbarians captured a ship which landed on their homeworld long ago and took its technology to use for their own primitive purposes.

The genetic code of the aliens has been sequenced, but as for growing a test-tube alien — not likely. Such a proposal might bring the Gene-tweak Embargo back (I should be so lucky), and besides there's the resentment.

The *Prospector* crew also imagined, at first, that the initial shoal of a dozen caskets might be Von Neumann machines, automated drones built to reproduce more drones. But then a volunteer took a space-walk, opened a lid, and gazed in amazement — just like that old archeologist in Egypt upon the face of King Tut ...

So here are the two mutilated juveniles, on screen. How shall we log the contents of this particular coffin?

"You can't call them injured," says Carl. "This is post-mortem damage." The fact is that whatever any of the aliens originally died from, none encountered so far has been obviously injured. No crushed skulls or broken rib cages. No missing limbs.

"A rock must have hit this coffin, that's all, Sondra. A tiny meteoroid. A collision would normally knock a coffin way off course over such a distance. That's why a damaged coffin has never arrived here 'til now. That's all."

Part of that's true enough. A hundred thousand years ago (as evidenced by carbon dating, and the amount of micro-pitting in the steel) the coffins must have been aimed very accurately — dead at our Sun. (Compensating, I guess, for stellar motion.)

And it's no mystery where they came from. Take the direction, velocity, and estimated age of coffins; and backtrack. Easy-peasy-Japanesey. The star in question only had a number previously. Now it's known as Deathstar, a name borrowed from some vintage early flatscreen movie.

Unfortunately Deathstar's right down on the ecliptic. Consequently coffins come straight in through the plane of the solar system. If only Deathstar had been high above the planetary plane, coffins could have rained down into the Sun without being so much of a hazard!

En route, the coffins had a hundred thousand years to diverge. A bashed casket would probably miss the solar system entirely. As for unbashed ones, the vast majority of those wouldn't plunge directly into the Sun, even so. Oh no, they would loop around the gravitational well, and zoom out again — captured, but not yet consumed.

The loops could take them as far out as the orbit of Mars. The coffins might undertake (ha!) hundreds or thousands of elliptical orbits before the final fiery evaporating descent.

Hence the expletives-deleted resentment. How *long* had the Coffin Builders continued their capers? Twenty years? A century? Half a millennium? During the equivalent time the human race would be on the receiving end. Space is vast, but space could become somewhat *busy* with speeding coffins as more and more shoals arrived to add to the carousel.

Only solution: the vacuum cleaner patrol. Special *Ferryman* ships; special ferrymen like us.

"Listen, Carl: we've never found any baby corpses. Some half-grown juveniles like these, and mostly adults, but never babies. You've never even thought to pretend that you found four babies tethered head to toe."

"Drat, I missed a trick. So what?"

"Babies," I say triumphantly, "couldn't give informed consent."

"What in the moon are you talking about?"

Liz smirks. "I suspect Sondra has a theory ..."

"OK," I tell my buddies, "how about this? Religion obsesses the barbarians —"

"The monsters."

"They believe dead bodies will go to heaven or something if they send them to another star. Ours."

"Royal dead bodies," Marco chips in. "Noble ones. Privileged and rich, otherwise they couldn't have afforded it." I think he's trying to back me up. "This does beg the question of why they fixed on *our* Sun. Seen from Deathstar, Sol wouldn't be one of the big bright luminaries."

"Aha," says Carl, "that's because our ancestors from Atlantis visited the monsters' world and raised them from bestiality to intellect. About a million years ago. Long enough ago for all trace of Atlantis to be forgotten. By us, but not by the monsters."

"Will you listen to me?"

"Silence in court," says Liz, "the monkey wants to speak."

"Never mind about why they chose our Sun. So anyway, they dedicate a big slice of their resources to launching corpses in our direction — with the same zeal that the old Egyptians devoted to mummifying people and cats and flamingos wholesale. We're talking religion. Afterlife or maybe even resurrection."

"Undeniably," agrees Marco.

"So they deliberately *only* send perfect bodies."

"Or else they used the best morticians."

"Guys, they only send bodies without blemish." Punchline: "All the corpses are volunteers. Healthy, good-looking individuals —"

"Good-looking monsters —"

"— would volunteer to die in a kind of euthanasia sacrifice! That's why there aren't ever any babies. Juveniles could give consent, but babies couldn't."

This is a bit of a stunner for Carl and Liz. I recall a theory about how the Coffin Builders may have believed that their offspring didn't acquire souls until a certain age, such as when they could speak properly. But never anything like this insight of mine!

It's new.

"Do you know," says Liz, "you may have a point."

"This observation," Marco assures me, "is certainly going into the Captain's Log."

Carl claps slowly. But he's impressed. "The soon-to-be-famous Beidermeier Hypothesis!"

Let me enjoy a surge of pride. I shan't exactly be up there with wonderful Norma Notridge as a name. Maybe somewhere in the foothills. Or in the footnotes.

"Actually," says Marco, "I think this deserves squirting to Mars to establish intellectual property. Priority, I mean."



LD SAYING: WHO PAYS THE *FERRYMAN*? That's a reference to the legendary boatman who ferried the dead across the river of death — the Styx of Greek and Roman times, or in the myths of Marco's forebears, the river of Tuonela. Marco — Hakkonen — comes from Copernicus unlike us other three Serenity-ites. Quite a few Finns live in Copernicus Colony. Month-long lunar nights are a snap for Finns, Carl once quipped. (But everybody on the Moon lives by artificial light.)

Who pays? The corpses certainly don't, nor do their alien relatives. Quite a lot of

Egyptian mummies were misused by later generations of peasants as firewood or were ground up by charlatans to make fake drugs. The dead aliens have fared *much* better at our hands.

But SpaceAdmin Mars squirts *us* first of all, while we're all stretched out in our separate long tetherbeds — we don't shoot the rabbit all the time. I've woken early. I'm thinking of the exact phrasing of the Beidermeier Hypothesis. The 'Sondra Theory' would sound neater.

Our radar alarm goes off. So we all hurry to the control room, worrying that a high-speed rock is heading for *Ferryman 3*. Oughtn't to be a rogue coffin. We've cleaned up the latest shoal, and our racks are two-thirds full by now. *Ferryman 2* is due in ten days. None of the hearseships have run out of rack-space yet, though *2* once came close to it.

No, not a rock. The red light flashing on the radio indicates an urgent squirt from Mars.

An alien starship is incoming. At a high percentage of the speed of light. Decelerating, yet still enormously fast.

An alien starship. It couldn't be a human starship since we don't have any. One of the big telescopes on the Moon's backside spotted the starship. Calculating its course backward puts its vector within a few light-years of our source of coffins. Close, but not close enough. Naturally we don't know what distance it traveled to reach the solar system.

An advanced alien civilization. A starship which can travel at anywhere near the speed of light completely diminishes our slow caskets.

According to Mars, the starship won't pass within ten million miles of us. Nevertheless, we're out in the front line, so to speak.

That's because the starship's extrapolated speed and course are such that it could use the Sun's gravity for breaking and to slingshot itself back out toward Jupiter. If it uses Jupiter for further braking, so as to head in-system again at a more modest velocity, on account of where Jupiter is right now this maneuver will bring the starship quite close by us the second time. Mars is going to upload all data regularly into our comp.

"Maybe it's only going to fly by," says Carl. "Whoosh and away."

Marco points out that it's too big to be an automatic probe. QED, it has a crew.

"That still doesn't mean the monsters won't fly by."

I must protest. "This isn't the right attitude!" This is the Big Discovery. OK, they discovered us; not us, them. "Anyway, they can't be the Coffin Makers. Direction isn't quite right, hmm? And the Coffin Makers must have run out of steam millennia ago. Hey, unless of course ..."

Marco and Carl look at me expectantly. "Unless their civilization rose and fell, and rose and fell. Like wobbly cycles. That could be how the barbarians got hold of high tech to launch coffins. Suppose they reach another star system. They colonize it. They relapse into barbarism. Or vice versa. Much later, an expedition tries to re-establish contact — one way or the other. Religious barbarians grab the goodies. That way we don't need to invent a second race of aliens they stole from."

"That way," says Carl ominously, "means there *are* monsters on board the starship."

Liz has been calculating. "I *think* ... on the way inward, this first time ... I think their starship's going to pass quite close to the Moon. We shan't be at home to see them!"

Oh be real, Liz. If we were on the Moon, we might only glimpse the starship for an instant or two. If it does the Sun-and-Jupiter trick, we'll get a far longer look.

HORRORS.

As the starship streaked close by the Moon it launched a small missile. The warhead must have been of anti-matter — the Sea of Serenity acquired a new crater the size of Posidonius.

Serenity Colony has become silent. Breathless.

"Monsters, monsters!" raves Carl. Our families, our friends, our home, all gone. Our everything, gone. The emptiness is sickening. Only something heroic or splendid could fill it.

SPACEADMIN MARS IN THE PERSON OF NONE OTHER THAN HIROSHI Nomura talks to us an hour later. Because of the radio-delay he makes a formal speech, an appeal, which we replay.

Slowed by the Sun, the starship is definitely heading back toward Jupiter. Jupiter will slow the starship more, and put it on an Earthward heading. It'll pass within fifty thousand clicks of our present position. Time enough for us to cram on gees and reach the passing point.

Another thing I recall about those Japanese, aside from tatami mats and rice and pickles, is that during the Second Global War they used suicide volunteers to pilot flying bombs and torpedoes ...

Nomura-san's plea is that we should accelerate to max, and ram the starship. No *Prospector* craft is positioned as favorably as we are.

If Serenity is a sample of things to come, the Earth's biosphere may be devastated by titanic anti-matter explosions, equivalent to several comet impacts such as caused mass extinctions in the past. There might be nothing left alive on land but bugs and microbes, and nothing much in the seas but worms and algae.

On behalf of billions of living beings, not forgetting dolphins and elephants and eagles and polar bears, and I suppose flamingos too, Nomura-san beseeches us.

WE HAVE ABOUT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS 'TIL THE ESTIMATED TIME OF collision. A couple of us will be able to abandon ship. We can use our coffin-collecting drones as life rafts, taking extra air-tanks with us. Beacons on the drones. *Ferryman 2* will speed up to max. The two bail-outs will become very hungry and thirsty and messy before *F2* reaches us, but they ought to survive, unless they go crazy drifting in the cold empty darkness.

And two must stay on the ship. Because of time-lag in uploading data, two need to stay on board for last moment corrections.

Two to stay, two to go. Two to die, two to live, perhaps.

Marco and Carl are already pondering in an old-fashioned way. Accepting Nomura-san's logic.

"It's emotional blackmail," says Marco. "Even so! If I'd been born a couple of hundred years ago, I'd already be dead." That's certainly one way of looking at losing one's life.

"Me too," Carl seconds him. "Those monsters just have to be zapped.

We're the only chance." Ah, now he can annihilate his anxieties.

And of course it's Liz and me who must take to the life rafts. What I say is: "I want to know *why* they're behaving like monsters."

Marco thinks he knows. "They must be utterly xenophobic. They're unable to tolerate the knowledge that aliens exist — namely us."

Kamikaze: that was the name for the suicide pilots whom Nomura-san is asking two of us to emulate ...

"Those *kamikazes* piloted aircraft packed with explosives?" Marco asks me. We don't need any explosives. Our mass and velocity will be quite sufficient.

It's now that I have my Idea.

IT OUGHT TO WORK," AGREES CARL. "WE CAN'T TELL NOMURA. We can't broadcast this. We might seem like cowards."

"What about this business of Sondra and Liz abandoning ship?" Marco wants to know. "Do we pretend they're with the drones? Do we fake it?"

"Ahem." Liz clears her throat. "How about saying that we are all staying together by choice?"

"Mightn't that seem a bit hypocritical? Us pretending to be heroic but not really risking our lives at all."

"OK, then: *Personally* I refuse to spend a week or so stuck in a spacesuit! I'll stink, and I'm not drinking recycled piss."

Oh yes, vanity is a much better excuse. When everyone learns the truth, they can chuckle rather than fume indignantly. The beauty is this: None of us need die. We have almost two hundred steel coffins in the mag-racks below the ship. Two hundred torpedoes. Seemingly a bow-wave precedes the starship, twisting debris and dust aside, some byproduct of the star-drive. However, the starship's flanks remain exposed. So we'll ramp up to max. We'll head for the position the starship will pass through. Then bingo, we demagnetize the racks. We reverse the thrust of the propulsion unit up above *Ferryman*.

I suppose we'll all black out, and our harnesses might bruise us badly, although they oughtn't to snap. As soon as the thrust is reversed, *Ferryman* starts slowing pretty dramatically. Two hundred loose torpedoes rush on ahead at our former max speed.

Splat, bang, into the starship.

If the coffins diverge a bit, well and good. More chances of hits. Any hits are going to cause havoc. Trust Carl to point out that the starship mightn't entirely disintegrate. "It *would* if *Ferryman* hit it. The monsters'll probably all die, whichever, but the wreckage, the wreckage might give us a clue — a clue to the star-drive!"

Oh this is definitely worth a gamble.

OFF-WATCH IN OUR TETHERBEDS, WE'RE UNDER ACCELERATION AND feel heavy. So there's no shooting any rabbits, even if this might be our last opportunity.

Pop some pep-pills and stay awake all the time until zero hour? Nomura-san might like us to spend the long interval meditating, but not likely. We want to be super-alert.

I doze. Then I wake because of some irrelevant creak in the ship's fabric. I was dreaming of Graveyard, Graveyard seen on some screen. Not one of *Ferryman*'s screens. A telecast of Graveyard.

Now I remember! A living alien was sitting staring at the screen. The bony ridge on its head sported a crest of bristles like some ancient helmet. The rest of its head was shaven. Its eyes were red. Its lips were drawn back in such a toothy snarl — of outrage.

Creak-creak. Nothing serious. This time I'll dive deep down into the well of sleep.

I'M THE GREAT CHARISMATIC PROPHET-LEADER OF THE PEOPLE. I've united all the warring tribes, so skilled in metalwork and pyrotechnics.

A swirling vision has shown me that we must rise up above our world and ourselves and our squabbles. Up, up, into the realm of our sun and the stars which are other suns.

If heroes accept death voluntarily and sacrificially, and if their

preserved bodies can be sent to a far star; they will be resurrected as beings of plasma — as gaseous intelligences living in the fires of that star. They will swell its fires so that the star will become a beacon, testifying to their transfiguration.

Meanwhile the People will spread out to other worlds of our sun and then to the worlds of other stars — instead of annihilating one another here, which otherwise seems all too likely sooner or later.

We must rise into space, propelled by this vision. The timescale must be huge. We must not send those sacrificial corpses into our own sun. If no resurrected beings of plasma were to result, my vision would be a failure.

I shall choose a star which we can see with the naked eye, but which isn't exactly our next-door neighbor. When we do reach the other stars, let that one star remain taboo

AND NOW ON FIFTY WORLDS, ON THE EVE OF HIS DAY, VAST CROWDS of the People gaze into the night sky at a certain star in expectation of some transcendental climax, such as that star going nova. Drums beat and pipes skirl and priests chant and hawkers sell little telescopes.

His Name has accumulated vast size and momentum, like a snowball rolling from the top of an Alp or a Himalaya, rolling for a hundred thousand years, despite some ups and downs.

ONCE UPON A TIME SOME GERMAN CHEMIST DISCOVERED THE STRUCTURE of the benzene ring in a dream. He dreamed of a snake curled in a circle, biting its own tail

"Hell, I was right about the lack of babies, wasn't I?"

"Were you, Sonda?"

"Yes! And I'm right about this. It's more than a hunch about which coffin to collect first. It's a *vision*!"

Eventually, the aliens did colonize all the nearby solar systems — except ours. Maybe their civilization rose and fell several times. But always, from the dawn of their space age, they kept alive the tradition of our sun being especially sacred. Not to be visited. An out-of-bounds shrine to the great founder.

"OK, since last century they've been able to detect our radio and TV transmissions. Fifteen years ago, the first coffins begin arriving. And we stack the coffins in a junkyard!

"Pretty blasphemous, huh? Maybe they don't exactly believe any longer in our sun flaring up — or at least the wisecracking ones don't — but we're committing sacrilege against the spirit which inspired their society!"

Why haven't we detected any electromagnetic noise from them? Maybe their civilization doesn't leak much noise. Maybe they only use tight-beam signals.

"If we wreck that starship of theirs," is my view, "then we had better be ready to build a space navy to patrol our fringes. All the nearby star systems might be full of aliens incensed at us."

I GUESS A PSYCHOLOGIST COULD SAY THAT THERE'S A certain mutual *folie* about a small crew who are isolated together for long periods of time. Either you all get on together or you go nuts. And a charismatic personality can swing things.

The idea of more vessels full of angry monsters arriving does not appeal to Carl in the least. Liz likes the idea of a slightly expanded fleet of *Ferryman* ships collecting incoming coffins and ferrying them closer to the Sun for disposal in its incinerator. Or maybe just redirecting them more accurately and tidily, in clusters, with warning beacons attached.

We're all still gutted about the destruction of Serenity, which breeds a gut desire for revenge. Ram the starship! Kill the monsters! It's this response which Marco distrusts, now that he's had time to think about it. When did warfare ever solve anything? How could we possibly afford to build and run a huge navy which would be doing sweet nothing most of the time (or even all of the time)?

We shan't involve Mars in our deliberations. Nomura-san wouldn't

see things the way we see them, out here in the front line.

WE'VE GYROED *FERRYMAN*. WE'VE ROTATED IT ON ITS AXIS. WE'VE maxed the magnetism which holds the coffins. We've programmed the superfusion for pulse after pulse to change course. We're blacking out briefly again and again, ignoring the manufacturer's stress tolerances and nature's own constraints in regard to our bodies. We're aching with bruises. We're really suffering. We'll be black and blue. No cracked ribs yet, thanks be. When we boasted to those miners about maneuverability, little did we think. Even so, it'll be touch and go.

Not *touch* in the sense of us being very near the starship when it passes. Not now we shan't be. *Touch* in the sense of 'Will we have achieved a perfect sun-course soon enough?' The aliens are bound to detect us. (Aren't they?) Surely they'll have instruments to capture and magnify and replay images of our hearse-ship aiming toward the Sun. Out here we're very far from the Sun — but let our good intentions be obvious!

"STARSHIP'S ON RADAR," GROANS CARL. "FIVE THOUSAND KLIKKS, FOUR-eight, four-six —"

Marco pulses us again and we black out briefly. Groggily I recover vision like a battered boxer.

"Sun-target, spot on —"

At last. At last. "Three-two, three thousand, two-eight —"

Our closest mutual distance will be about one-four.

"Ready for reverse thrust —"

That's when our strained ship might tear apart.

We'll launch the coffins at two-thousand, so the aliens will have time to see what we're doing.

"Two-two —"

The crushing squeeze. Sparkling stars cavorting. Blackness.

Liz moans at broken ribs. Marco's left eye has a hemorrhage. Blood trickles from my nose. Such a headache. I feel as if an iridium miner has beaten me up.

But our two hundred torpedo-coffins have flown true — toward the far-off Sun. Far truer than ever they flew before.

As we limp back toward Phobos there's bitter resentment in the squirts from SpaceAdmin. Odium and opprobrium. We coast along at nowhere near max — not wishing to strain the ship, but nor do we care to arrive anywhere too soon.

Inward bound, the twice-slowed starship is still a week away from Earth.

We're purple with bruises. Liz's ribs have been bound up satisfactorily. The blood is slowly clearing from Marco's eye. When Marco squirted Mars about my inspiration, he backed me up a hundred percent. We're never so united as now.

AND IT HAPPENS! IT ISN'T ANY PRANK OF CARL'S WHEN HE CALLS US deliriously to the control room. To play a joke at such a time would be sick.

It's true news. The starship has lit its anti-matter torch or something. It's accelerating. It's veering from an Earthward course. It's going to head out of our system — toward some other star where the descendants of the Coffin Makers must also live.

No communications come from the starship. I suppose we're taboo.

Yet they have analyzed what I did. They understood my non-verbal message. They know that now we will carry out our task appropriately.

Such joy, throughout Sunspace. Such applause. Although I ache all over — and in my heart for lost family and friends — my name reverberates. Norma Notridge, I excel you, I exceed you.

CARL'S VOICE COMES OVER COM A FEW DAYS later.

"Oops, Sonda's coffins have reached the Sun —"

It's months too soon for that.

"My God, the Moon's reporting huge solar flares a million clicks high ..."

Timeless moments pass.

"Just joking," he adds. I rather think that our *Ferryman* fleet should be renamed the Sonda Squadron. □

The economist fled Helsinki to seek peace in a chimpanzee's soul. There could be no refuge, however, from the vengeance of Imperial Industrie.

IMPERSIUM

Africa came to them in air thick with smells.

In the dry, prickly heat was a promise

of the primitive, of ancient themes beyond knowing.

WARILY KELLY GAZED OUT AT THE VIEW BEYOND THE FORMIDABLE walls. "We're safe here from the animals?"

"I imagine so. Those walls are high and there are guard canines. Wirehounds, I believe."

"Good." She smiled in a way that he knew implied a secret was about to emerge. "I really urged you to come here to get you away from Helsinki."

"Not to study chimpanzees?"

"Oh, that might be useful — or better still, fun," she said with wifely nonchalance. "My main consideration was that if you had stayed in Helsinki you might be dead."

He stopped looking at the striking scenery. She was serious. "You think they would...?"

"They *could*, which is a better guide to action than trying to guess *woulds*."

"I see." He didn't, but he had learned to trust her judgment in matters of the world. "You think Imperial Industrie would...?"

"Knock you off for undermining their case? Sure. But they'd be careful."

"But the case is over. Settled."

He had made a successful sociometric prediction of political and economic trends in central Europe. His reputation was powerful enough to cause a fall in certain product markets. Economics increasingly resembled fashion: Commodities ratched like hemlines.

Imperial Industrie had lost considerably — a fortune, even for a world-wrapping corporation. They had accused him of manipulating the markets, but he had in all honesty merely tried to test his new model of sociohistory. His reputation among economic circles was enough to circulate the predictions. Imperial Industrie, he thought, was simply

GREGORY BENFORD

being childish. Reason would prevail there soon enough.

"You intend to make more predictions, don't you?" she asked.

"Well, once I get some better parameter fixes —"

"There. Then they can lose again. Imperial doesn't like losing."

"You exaggerate." He dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand.

Then too, he thought, perhaps he did need a vacation. To be on a rough, natural world — he had forgotten, in the years buried in Helsinki, how vivid wild things could be. Greens and yellows leaped out, after decades amid steel and glitter.

Here the sky yawned impossibly deep, unmarked by the graffiti of aircraft, wholly alive to the flapping wonder of birds. Bluffs and ridges looked like they had been shaped hastily with a putty knife. Beyond the station walls he could see a sole tree thrashed by an angry wind. Its topknot finally blew off in a pocket of wind, fluttering and fraying over somber flats like a fragmenting bird. Distant, eroded mesas had yellow streaks down their shanks which, as they met the forest, turned a burnt orange tinge that suggested the rot of rust. Across the valley, where the chimps ranged, lay a dusky canopy hidden behind low gray clouds and raked by winds. A thin, cold rain fell there and Leon wondered what it was like to cower beneath the sheets of moisture, without hope of shelter or warmth. Perhaps Helsinki's utter predictability was better, but he wondered, breathing in the tangy air.

He pointed to the distant forest. "We're going there?" He liked this fresh place, though the jungle was foreboding. It had been a long time since he had even worked with his hands, alongside his father, back on the farm.

"Don't start judging."

"I'm anticipating."

She grinned. "You always have a longer word for it, no matter what I say."

"The treks look a little, well — touristy."

"Of course. We're tourists."

The land here rose up into peaks as sharp as torn tin. In the thick trees beyond, mist broke on gray smooth rocks. Even here, high up the slope of an imposing ridge, the Excursion Station was hemmed in by slimy, thick-barked trees standing in deep drifts of dead, dark leaves. With rotting logs half buried in the wet layers, the air swarmed so close it was like breathing damp opium.

Kelly stood, her drink finished. "Let's go in, socialize."

He followed dutifully and right away knew it was a mistake. Most of the indoor stim-party crowd was dressed in rugged safari-style gear. They were ruddy folk, faces flushed with excitement or perhaps just enhancers. Leon waved away the bubbleglass-bearing waiter; he disliked the way it dulled his wits. Still, he smiled and tried to make small talk.

This turned out to be not merely small, but microscopic. "Where are you from? Oh, *Helsinki* — what's it like? We're from (fill in the city) — have you ever heard of it?" Of course he had not.

Most were Primitivists, drawn by the unique experience available here. It seemed to him that every third word in their conversation was *natural* or *vital*, delivered like a mantra.

"What a *relief*, to be away from straight lines," a thin man said.

"Um, how so?" Leon said, trying to seem interested.

"Well, of course straight lines don't exist in nature. They have to be put there by humans." He sighed. "I love to be free of straightness!"

Leon instantly thought of pine needles; strata of metamorphic rock; the inside edge of a half-moon; spider-woven silk strands; the line along the top of a breaking ocean wave; crystal patterns; white quartz lines on granite slabs; the far horizon of a vast calm lake; the legs of birds; spikes of cactus; the arrow dive of a raptor; trunks of young, fast-growing trees; wisps of high wind-blown clouds; ice cracks; the two sides of the V of migrating birds; icicles.

"Not so," he said, but no more.

His habit of laconic implication was trampled in the headlong talk, of course; the enhancers were taking hold. They all chattered on, excited by the prospect of immersing themselves in the lives of the creatures roaming the valleys below. He listened, not commenting, intrigued. Some wanted to share the world view of herd animals, others of hunters, some of birds. They spoke as though they were enter-

ing some athletic event, and that was not his view at all. Still, he stayed silent.

He finally escaped with Kelly into the small park beside the Excursion Station, designed to make guests familiar with local conditions before their treks or immersions. There were whole kraals of domestic stock. The unique assets, the genetically altered and enhanced animals, were nowhere near, of course.

He stopped and stared at the kraals and thought again about socio-history. His mind kept diving at it from many angles. He had learned to just stand aside and let his thoughts run.

ANIMALS. WAS THERE A CLUE HERE? DESPITE MILLENNIA OF trying, humans had domesticated, few animals. To be domesticated, wild beasts had to have an entire suite of traits. Most had to be herd animals, with instinctive submission patterns which humans could co-opt. They had to be placid; herds that bolt at a strange sound and can't tolerate intruders are hard to keep. Finally, they had to be willing to breed in captivity. Most humans didn't want to court and copulate under the watchful gaze of others, and neither did most animals.

So here there were sheep and goats and cows, slightly adapted by biotechnology but otherwise unremarkable. Except for the chimps. They were unique artifacts of this preservation deep in the rugged laboratory of central Africa.

A wirehound came sniffing, checking them out, muttering an unintelligible apology. "Interesting," he remarked to Kelly, "that Primitivists still want to be protected from the wild, by the domesticated."

"Well, of course. This fellow is *big*."

"Not sentimental about the natural state? We were once just another type of large mammal."

"The natural state might be a pleasant place to visit, but ..."

"Right, wouldn't want to live there. Still, I want to try the chimps."

"What? An immersion?" Her eyebrows lifted in mild alarm.

"As long as we're here, why not?"

"I don't... well, I'll think about it."

"You can bail out at any time, they say."

She nodded, pursed her lips. "Um."

"We'll *feel* at home — the way chimps do."

"You believe everything you read in a brochure?"

"I did some research. It's a well-developed tech."

Her lips had a skeptical tilt. "Um."

He knew by now better than to press her. Let time do his work.

The canine, quite large and alert, snuffled at his hand and slurred, "Goood naaaght, suuur." He stroked it. In its eyes he saw a kinship, an instant rapport that he did not need to think about. For one who dwelled in his head so much, this was a welcome rub of reality.

Significant evidence, he thought. *We have a deep past together*. Perhaps that was why he wanted to immerse in a chimp. To go far back, peering beyond the vexing state of being human.

"WE'RE CERTAINLY CLOSELY RELATED, YES," EXPERT SPECIALIST RUBEN said. He was a big man, tanned and muscular and casually confident. He was both a safari guide and immersion specialist, with a biology background. He did research using immersion techniques, but keeping the Station going soaked up most of his time, he said. "Chimp-riding is the best immersion available."

Leon looked skeptical. *Pan troglodytes* had hands with thumbs, the same number of teeth as humans, no tails, but he had never felt great empathy for them, seen behind bars in a zoo.

Ruben waved a big hand at the landscape below the Station. "We hope to make them more useful. We haven't tried training them much, beyond research purposes. Remember, they're supposed to be kept wild. The original UN grant stipulated that."

"Tell me about your research," Leon said. In his experience, no scientist ever passed up a chance to sing his own song. He was right.

They had taken human DNA and chimp DNA — Ruben said, waxing enthusiastically on — then unzipped the double helix strands in both. Linking one human strand with a chimp strand made a hybrid.

Where the strands complemented, the two then tightly bound in a partial, new double helix. Where they differed, bonding between the strands was weak, intermittent, with whole sections flapping free.

Then they spun the watery solutions in a centrifuge, so the weak sections ripped apart. Closely linked DNA was 98.2 percent of the total. Chimps were startlingly like humans. Less than 2 percent different — yet they lived in forests and invented nothing.

The typical difference between individual people's DNA was a 10th of a percentage point, Ruben said. Roughly, then, chimps were twenty times more different from humans than particular people differed among themselves — genetically. But genes were like levers, supporting vast weights by pivoting about a small fulcrum.

"But we don't *come* from them. We parted company, genetically, six million years ago."

"Do they think like us?" Leon asked.

"Best way to tell is an immersion," Ruben said. "Very best way."

He smiled invitingly, and Leon wondered if Ruben got a commission on immersions. His sales pitch was subtle, shaped for an academic's interest — but still a sales pitch.

Ruben had already made the vast stores of data on chimp movements, population dynamics, and behaviors available to Leon. It was a rich source and with some math modeling might be fertile ground for a simple description, using a truncated version of sociohistory.

"Describing the life history of a species mathematically is one thing," Kelly said. "But *living* in it ..."

"Come now," Leon said. Even though he knew the entire Excursion Station was geared to sell the guests safaris and immersions, he was intrigued. "I need a change," you said. "Get out of stuffy old Helsinki," you said."

Ruben said warmly, "It's completely safe."

Kelly smiled at Leon tolerantly. "Oh, all right."

HE SPENT MORNINGS STUDYING THE CHIMP DATA BANKS. THE MATHEMATICIAN in him pondered how to represent their dynamics with a trimmed-down sociohistory. The marble of fate rattling down a cracked slope. So many paths, variables....

In the afternoons they took several treks. Kelly did not like the dust and heat and they saw few animals. "What self-respecting beast would want to be seen with these over-dressed Primitivists?" she said. The others could never stop talking; that kept the animals away.

He liked the atmosphere and relaxed into it as his mind kept on working. He thought about this as he stood on the sweeping veranda, drinking pungent fruit juice as he watched a sunset. Kelly stood beside him silently. Raw Africa made it clear that the Earth was an energy funnel, he thought. At the bottom of the gravitational well, Earth captured for use barely a tenth of a percent of the sunlight that fell. Nature built organic molecules with a star's energy. In turn, plants were prey for animals, who could harvest roughly a tenth of the plant's stored energy. Grazers were themselves prey to meat-eaters, who could use about a tenth of the flesh-stored energy. So, he estimated, only about one part in a hundred thousand of a star's lancing energy wound up in the predators.

Wasteful! Yet nowhere had a more efficient engine evolved. Why not? Predators were invariably more intelligent than their prey, and they sat atop a pyramid of very steep slopes. Omnivores had a similar balancing act. Out of that rugged landscape had come humanity.

That fact *had* to matter greatly in any sociohistory. The chimps, then, were essential to finding the ancient keys to the human psyche.

Kelly said, "I hope immersion isn't, well, so hot and sticky."

"Remember, you'll see the world through different eyes."

She snorted. "Just so I can come back whenever I want and have a nice hot bath."

"COMPARTMENTS"? KELLY SHIED BACK. "THEY LOOK MORE LIKE CASKETS." "They have to be snug, Madam."

ExSpec Ruben smiled amiably — which, Leon sensed, probably meant he wasn't feeling amiable at all. Their conversation had been friendly, the staff here was respectful of the noted Dr. Mattick, but, after all, basically he and Kelly were just more

tourists. Paying for a bit of primitive fun, all couched in proper scholarly terms, but — tourists.

"You're kept in fixed status, all body systems running slow but normal," the ExSpec said, popping out the padded networks for inspection. He ran through the controls, emergency procedures, safeguards.

"Looks comfortable enough," Kelly observed begrudgingly.

"Come on," Leon chided. "You promised we would do it."

"You'll be meshed into our systems at all times," Ruben said.

"Even your data library?" Leon asked.

"Sure thing."

The team of ExSpecs booted them into the stasis compartments with deft, sure efficiency. Tabs, pressors, magnetic pickups plated onto his skull to pick up thoughts directly. The very latest tech.

"Ready? Feeling good?" Ruben asked with his professional smile.

Leon was not feeling good (as opposed to feeling well) and he realized part of it was this ExSpec. He had always distrusted bland, assured people. Something about this one bothered him, but he could not say why. Oh well; Kelly was probably right. He needed a vacation. What better way to get out of yourself?

"Good, yes. Ready, yes."

THE SUSPENSION TECH SUPPRESSED NEUROMUSCULAR responses. The customer lay dormant, only his mind engaged with the chimp.

Magnetic webs capped over his cerebrum. Through electromagnetic inductance they interwove into layers of the brain. They routed signals along tiny thread-paths, suppressing many brain functions and blocking physiological processes. All this, so that the massively parallel circuitry of the brain could be inductively linked out, thought by thought. Then it was transmitted to chips embedded in the chimp subject. Immersion.

The technology had ramified throughout the world, quite famously. The ability to distantly manage minds had myriad uses. The suspension tech, however, found its own odd applications.

In certain European classes, women were wedded, then suspended for all but a few hours of the day. Their wealthy husbands awoke them from freeze-frame states only for social and sexual purposes. For more than a half century, the wives experienced a heady whirlwind of places, friends, parties, vacations, passionate hours — but their total accumulated time was only a few years. Their husbands died in what seemed to the wives like short order indeed. They left a wealthy widow of perhaps thirty. Such women were highly sought, and not only for their money. They were uniquely sophisticated, seasoned by a long "marriage." Often, these widows returned the favor, wedding freeze-frame husbands whom they revived for similar uses.

All this Leon had taken with the sophisticated veneer he had cultivated in Helsinki. So he thought his immersion would be comfortable, interesting, the stuff of stim-party talk.

He had thought that he would in some sense *visit* another, simpler, mind.

He did not expect to be swallowed whole.

A GOOD DAY. PLENTY OF GRUBS TO EAT IN A BIG MOIST LOG. DIG THEM out with my nails, fresh tangy sharp crunch.

Biggest, he shoves me aside. Scoops out plenty rich grubs. Grunts. Glowers.

My belly rumbles. I back off and eye Biggest. He's got pinched-up face so I know not to fool with him.

I walk away, I squat down. Get some picking from a fem. She finds some fleas, cracks them in her teeth.

Biggest rolls the log around some to knock a few grubs loose, finishes up. He's strong. Fems watch him. Over by the trees a bunch of fems chatter, suck their teeth. Everybody's sleepy now in early afternoon, lying in the shade. Biggest, though, he waves at me and Hunter and off we go.

Patrol. Strut tall, step out proud. I like it fine. Better than humping, even.

Down past the creek and along to where the hoof smells are. That's the shallow spot. We cross and go into the trees sniff-sniffing and there are two Strangers.

They don't see us yet. We move smooth, quiet. Biggest picks up a branch and we do too. Hunker is sniffing to see who these Strangers are and he points off to the hill. Just like I thought, they're Hillies. The worst. Smell bad.

Hillies come onto our turf. Make trouble. We make it back.

We spread out. Biggest, he grunts and they hear him. I'm already moving, branch held up. I can run pretty far without going all-four. The Strangers cry out, big-eyed. We go fast and then we're on them.

They have no branches. We hit them and kick and they grab at us. They are tall and quick. Biggest slams one to the ground. I hit that one so Biggest knows real well I'm with him. Hammer hard, I do. Then I go quick to help Hunker.

His Stranger has taken his branch away. I club the Stranger. He sprawls. I whack him good and Hunker jumps on him and it is wonderful.

The Stranger tries to get up and I kick him solid. Hunker grabs back his branch and hits again and again with me helping hard.

Biggest, his Stranger gets up and starts to run. Biggest whacks his ass with the branch, roaring and laughing.

Me, I got my skill. Special. I pick up rocks. I'm the best thrower, better than Biggest even.

Rocks are for Strangers. My buddies, them I'll scrap with, but never use rocks. Strangers, though, they deserve to get rocks in the face. I love to bust a Stranger that way.

I throw one clean and smooth and catch the Stranger on the leg. He stumbles and I smack him good with a sharp-edged rock, in the back. He runs fast then and I can see he's bleeding. Stranger leaves drops in the dust.

Biggest laughs and slaps me and I know I'm in good with him.

Hunker is clubbing his Stranger. Biggest takes my club and joins in. The blood all over the Stranger sings warm in my nose and I jump up and down on him. We keep at it like that a long time. Not worried about the other Stranger coming back. Strangers are brave sometime but they know when they have lost.

The Stranger stops moving. I give him one more kick.

No reaction. Dead maybe.

We scream and dance and holler out our joy.

LEON SHOOK HIS HEAD TO CLEAR IT. THAT HELPED A LITTLE.

"You were that big one?" Kelly asked. "I was the female, over by the trees."

"Sorry, I couldn't tell."

"It was ... different, wasn't it?"

He laughed drily. "Murder usually is."

"When you went off with the, well, leader —"

"My chimp thinks of him as 'Biggest.' We killed another chimp."

They were in the plush reception room of the immersion facility. Leon stood and felt the world tilt a little and then right itself. "I think I'll stick to historical research for a while."

Kelly smiled sheepishly. "I ... I rather liked it."

He thought a moment, blinked. "So did I," he said, surprising himself.

"Not the murder —"

"No, of course not. But ... the *feel*."

She grinned. "Can't get that in Helsinki, Professor."

HE SPENT TWO DAYS COASTING THROUGH COOL LATTICES OF DATA IN the formidable Station library. It was well-equipped and allowed interfaces with several senses. He patrolled through cool, digital labyrinths.

In the vector spaces portrayed on huge screens, the research data was covered with thick, bulky protocols and scabs of security precautions. All were easily broken or averted, of course, but the chunky abstracts, reports, summaries, and crudely processed statistics still resisted easy interpretation. Occasionally some facets of chimp

behavior were carefully hidden away in appendices and sidebar notes, as though the biologists in the lonely outpost were embarrassed by it. Some *was* embarrassing: mating behavior, especially. How could he use this?

He navigated through the 3-D maze and cobbled together his ideas. Could he follow a strategy of analogy?

Chimps shared nearly all their genes with humans, so chimp dynamics should be a simpler version of human dynamics. *Could he then analyze chimp troop interactions as a reduced case of sociohistory?*

At sunset of the next day he sat with Kelly watching blood red shafts spike through orange-tinged clouds. Africa was gaudy beyond good taste and he liked it. The food was tangy, too. His stomach rumbled in anticipation of dinner.

He remarked to Kelly, "It's tempting, using chimps to build a sort of toy model of sociohistory."

"But you have doubts."

"They're like us in ... only they have, well, uh ..."

"Base, animalistic ways?" She smirked, then kissed him. "My prudish Leon."

"We have our share of beastly behaviors, I know. But we're a lot smarter, too."

Her eyelids dipped in a manner he knew by now suggested polite doubt. "They live intensely, you'll have to give them that."

"Maybe we're smarter than we need to be anyway?"

"What?" This surprised her.

"I've been reading up on evolution. Plainly, the human brain was an evolutionary overshoot — far more capable than a competent hunter-gatherer needed. To get the better of animals, it would have been enough to master fire and simple stone tools. Such talents alone would have made people the lords of creation, removing selection pressure to change. Instead, all evidence from the brain itself said that change accelerated. The human cerebral cortex added mass, stacking new circuitry atop older wiring. That mass spread over the lesser areas like a thick new skin."

"Considering the state of the world, I'd say we need all the brains we can get," she said skeptically.

"From that layer came musicians and engineers, saints and savants," he finished with a flourish. One of Kelly's best points was her willingness to sit still while he waxed professorially long-winded, even on vacation. "And all this evolutionary selection happened in just a few million years."

Kelly snorted prettily. "Look at it from the woman's point of view. It happened, despite putting mothers in desperate danger in childbirth."

"Uh, how?"

"From those huge baby heads. They're hard to get out. We women are still paying the price for your brains — and for ours."

He chuckled. She always had a special spin on a subject that made him see it fresh. "Then why was it selected for, back then?"

Kelly smiled enigmatically. "Maybe men and women alike found intelligence sexy in each other."

"Really?"

Her sly smile. "How about us?"

"Have you ever watched very many 3-D stars? They don't feature brains, my dear."

"Remember the animals we saw in the Madrid Senso-Zoo? The mating exhibit? It could be that for early humans, brains were like peacock tails, or moose horns — display items, to attract the females. Runaway sexual selection."

"I see, an overplayed hand of otherwise perfectly good cards." He laughed. "So being smart is just a bright ornament."

"Works for me," she said, giving him a wink.

He watched the sunset turn to glowering, ominous crimson, oddly happy. Sheets of light worked across the sky among curious, layered clouds. "Ummm..." Kelly murmured.

"Yes?"

"Maybe this is a way to use the research the ExSpecs are doing, too. Learn who we were — and therefore who we are."

"Intellectually, it's a jump. In social ways, though, the gap could be less."

Kelly looked skeptical. "You think chimps are only a bit further back in a social sense?"

"Ummm. I wonder if in logarithmic time we might scale from chimps to us, now?"

"A big leap. To do anything you'll need more experience with them." She eyed him. "You like immersion, don't you?"

"Well, yes. It's just ..."

"What?"

"That ExSpec Ruben, he keeps pushing immersions —"

"That's his job."

"— and he knew who I was."

"So?" She spread her hands and shrugged.

"You're normally the suspicious one. Why should an ExSpec know an obscure mathematician?"

"He looked you up. Data dumps on incoming guests are standard. And in some circles you're hardly obscure. Plenty of people back in Helsinki line up to see you."

"And some would like to see me dead. Say, you're supposed to be the ever-vigilant one." He grinned. "Shouldn't you be encouraging my caution?"

"Paranoia isn't caution. Time spent on non-threats subtracts from vigilance."

By the time they went in for dinner she had talked him into more immersions.

OT DAY IN THE SUN. DUST MAKES ME SNORT.

That Biggest, he walks by, gets respect right away. Fems and guys alike, they stick out their hands.

Biggest touches them, taking time with each, letting them know he is there. The world is all right.

I reach out to him too. Makes me feel good. I want to be like Biggest, to be big, be as big as him, be *him*.

Fems don't give him any trouble. He wants one, she goes. Hump right away. He's Biggest.

Most males, they don't get much respect. Fems don't want to do with them as much as they do with Biggest. The little males, they huff and throw sand and all that but everybody knows they're not going to be much. No chance they could ever be like Biggest. They don't like that but they are stuck with it.

Me, I'm pretty big. I get respect. Some, anyway.

All the guys like stroking. Petting. Grooming. Fems give it to them and they give it back.

Guys get more though. After it, they're not so gruff.

I'm sitting getting groomed and all of a sudden I smell something. I don't like it. I jump up, cry out. Biggest, he takes notice. Smells it too.

Strangers. Everybody starts hugging each other. Strong smell, plenty of it. Lots of Strangers. The wind says they are near, getting nearer.

They come running down on us from the ridge. Looking for fems, looking for trouble.

I run for my rocks. I always have some handy. I fling one at them, miss. Then they are in among us. It's hard to hit them, they go so fast.

Four Strangers, they grab two fems. Drag them away.

Everybody howling, crying. Dust everywhere.

I throw rocks. Biggest leads the guys against the Strangers.

They turn and run off. Just like that. Got the two fems though and that's bad.

Biggest mad. He pushes around some of the guys, makes noise. He not looking so good now, he let the Strangers in.

Those Strangers bad. We all hunker down, groom each other, pet, make nice sounds.

Biggest, he come by, slap some of the fems. Hump some. Make sure everybody know he's still Biggest.

He don't slap me. He know better than to try. I growl at him when he come close and he pretend not to hear.

Maybe he not so Big any more, I'm thinking.

HE STAYED WITH IT THIS TIME. AFTER THE FIRST CRISIS, WHEN THE

Stranger chimps came running through, he sat and let himself get groomed for a long time. It really did calm him.

Him? Who was he?

This time he could fully sense the chimp mind. Not below him — that was an evolutionary metaphor — but *around* him. A swarming scattershot of senses, thoughts, fragments like leaves blowing by him in a wind.

And the wind was *emotion*. Blustering gales, howling and whipping in gusts, raining thoughts like soft hammer blows.

These chimps thought poorly, in the sense that he could get only shards, like human musings chopped by a nervous editor. But chimps *felt* intensely.

Of course, he thought — and he could think, nestled in the hard kernel of himself, wrapped in the chimp mind. *Emotions told it what to do, without thinking. Quick reactions demanded that. Strong feeling amplified subtle clues into strong imperatives. Blunt orders from Mother Evolution.*

He saw now that the belief that high order mental experiences like emotion were unique to people was ... simply conceited. These chimps shared much of the human world view. A theory of chimp sociohistory could be valuable.

He gingerly separated himself from the dense, pressing chimp mind. He wondered if the chimp knew he was here. Yes, it did — dimly. But somehow this did not bother the chimp. He integrated it into his blurred, blunt world. Leon was somewhat like an emotion, just one of many fluttering by and staying a while, then wafting away.

Could he be more than that? He tried getting the chimp to lift its right arm — and it was like lead. He struggled for a while that way with no success. Then he realized his error. He could not overpower this chimp, not as a kernel in a much larger mind.

He thought about this as the chimp groomed a female, picking carefully through coarse hair. The strands smelled good, the air was sweet, the sun stroked him with blades of generous warmth ...

Emotion. Chimps didn't follow instructions because that simply lay beyond them. They could not understand directions in the human sense. Emotions — those they knew. He had to be an emotion, not a little general giving orders.

He sat for a while simply *being* this chimp. He learned — or rather, he felt. The troop groomed and scavenged food, males eyeing the perimeter, females keeping close to the young. A lazy calm descended over him, carrying him effortlessly through warm moments of the day. Not since he was a boy had he felt anything like this. A slow, graceful easing, as though there were no time at all, only slices of eternity.

In this mood, he could concentrate on a simple movement — raising an arm, scratching — and create the desire to do it. His chimp responded. To make it happen, he had to *feel* his way toward a goal. Sail before the emotion wind.

Catching a sweet scent on the air, Leon thought about what food that might signal. His chimp meandered upwind, sniffed, discarded the clue as uninteresting. Leon could now smell the reason why: fruit, true, sweet, yes — but inedible for a chimp.

Good. He was learning. And he was integrating himself into the deep recesses of this chimp-mind.

Watching the troop, he decided to name the prominent chimps, to keep them straight: Agile the quick one, Sheelah the sexy one, Grubber the hungry one But what was his own name? His he dubbed Ipan. Not very original, but that was its main characteristic, *I as Pan troglodytes*.

Grubber found some bulb-shaped fruit and the others drifted over to scavenge. The hard fruit smelled a little too young (how did he know that?) but some ate it anyway.

And which of these was Kelly? They had asked to be immersed in the same troop, so one of these — he forced himself to count, though somehow the exercise was like moving heavy weights in his mind — these twenty-two was her. How could he tell? He ambled over to several females who were using sharp-edged stones to cut leaves from branches. They tied the strands together so they could carry food.

Leon peered into their faces. Mild interest, a few hands held out for

stroking, an invitation to groom. No glint of recognition in their eyes.

He watched a big fem, Sheelah, carefully wash sand-covered fruit in a creek. The troop followed suit; Sheelah was a leader of sorts, a female lieutenant to Biggest.

She ate with relish, looked around. There was grain growing nearby, past maturity, ripe tan kernels already scattered in the sandy soil. Concentrating, Leon could tell from the faint bouquet that this was a delicacy. A few chimps squatted and picked grains from the sand, slow work. Sheelah did the same, and then stopped, gazing off at the creek. Time passed, insects buzzed. After a while she scooped up sand and kernels and walked to the brook's edge. She tossed it all in. The sand sank, the kernels floated. She skimmed them off and gulped them down, grinning widely.

An impressive trick. The other chimps did not pick up on her kernel-skimming method. Fruit washing was conceptually easier, he supposed, since the chimp could keep the fruit the whole time. Kernel-skimming demanded throwing away the food first, then rescuing it — a harder mental jump.

He thought about her and in response Ipan sauntered over her way. He peered into Sheelah's eyes — and she winked at him. Kelly! He wrapped hairy arms around her in a burst of sweaty love.

PURE ANIMAL LOVE," SHE SAID OVER DINNER. "REFRESHING." Leon nodded. "I like being there, living that way."

"I can *smell* so much more."

"Fruit tastes differently when they bite into it." He held up a purple bulb, sliced into it, forked it into his mouth. "To me, this is almost unbearably sweet. To Ipan, it's pleasant, a little peppery. I suppose chimps have been selected for a sweet tooth. It gets them more fast calories."

"I can't think of a more thorough vacation. Not just getting away from home, but getting away from your species."

He eyed the fruit. "And they're so, so..."

"Horny?"

"Insatiable."

"You didn't seem to mind."

"My chimp, Ipan? I bail out when he gets into his hump-them-all mood."

She eyed him. "Really?"

"Don't you bail out?"

"Yes, but I don't expect men to be like women."

"Oh?" he said stiffly.

"I've been reading in the ExSpec's research library, while you toy with chimp social movements. Women invest heavily in their children. Men can use two strategies — parental investment, plus 'sow the oats'." She lifted an eyebrow. "Both must have been selected for in our evolution, because they're both common."

"Not with *me*."

To his surprise, she laughed. "I'm talking in general. My point is: the chimps are much more promiscuous than we are. The males run everything. They help out the females who are carrying their children, I gather, but then they shop around elsewhere *all* the time."

Leon switched into his professional mode; it was decidedly more comfortable, when dealing with such issues. "As the specialists say, they are pursuing a mixed reproductive strategy."

"How polite."

"Polite plus precise."

Of course, he couldn't really be sure Kelly bailed out of Sheelah when a male came by for a quick one. (They were always quick, too — thirty seconds or less.) *Could* she exit the chimp mind that quickly? He required a few moments to extricate himself. Of course, if she saw the male coming, guessed his intentions...

He was surprised at himself. What role did jealousy have when they were inhabiting other bodies? Did the usual moral code make any sense? Yet to talk this over with her was ... embarrassing.

He was still the country boy, like it or not.

Ruefully he concentrated on his meal of local "roamer-fleisch," which turned out to be an earthy, dark meat in a stew of tangy vegetables. He ate heartily and in response to Kelly's rather obviously

amused silence said, "I'd point out that chimps understood commerce, too. Food for sex, betrayal of the leader for sex, spare my child for sex, grooming for sex, just about anything for sex."

"It does seem to be their social currency. Short and decidedly not sweet. Just quick lunges, strong sensations, then boom — it's over."

He nodded. "The males need it, the females use it."

"Ummm, you've been taking notes."

"If I'm going to model chimps as a sort of simplified people, then I must."

"Model chimps?" came the assured tones of ExSpec Ruben. "They're not model citizens, if that's what you mean." He gave them a sunny smile and Leon guessed this was more of the obligatory friendliness of this place.

Leon smiled mechanically. "I'm trying to find the variables that could describe chimp behavior."

"You should spend a lot of time with them," Ruben said, sitting at the table and holding up a finger to a waiter for a drink. "They're subtle creatures."

"I agree," said Kelly. "Do you ride them very much?"

"Some, but most of our research is done differently now." Ruben's mouth twisted ruefully. "Statistical models, that sort of thing. I got this touring idea started, using the immersion tech we had developed earlier, to make money for the project. Otherwise, we'd have had to close."

"I'm happy to contribute," Leon said.

"Admit it — you like it," Kelly said, amused.

"Well, yes. It's ... different."

"And good for the staid Professor Mattick to get out of his shell," she said.

Ruben beamed. "Be sure you don't take chances out there. Some of our customers think they're superchimps or something."

Kelly's eyes flickered. "What danger is there? Our bodies are in slowtime, back here."

Ruben said, "You're strongly linked. A big shock to a chimp can drive a back-shock in your own neurological systems."

"What sort of shock?" Leon asked.

"Death, major injury."

"In that case," Kelly said to Leon, "I really do not think you should immerse."

Leon felt irked. "Come on! I'm on vacation, not in prison."

"Any threat to you —"

"Just a minute ago you were rhapsodizing about how good for me it was."

"You're too important to —"

"There's really very little danger," Ruben came in smoothly. "Chimps don't die suddenly, usually."

"And I can bail out when I see danger coming," Leon added.

"But *will* you? I think you're getting a taste for adventure."

She was right, but he wasn't going to concede the point. If he wanted a little escape from his humdrum mathematician's routine, so much the better. "I like being out of Helsinki's endless corridors."

Ruben gave Kelly a confident smile. "And we haven't lost a tourist yet."

"How about research staff?" she shot back.

"Well, that was a most unusual —"

"What happened?"

"A chimp fell off a ledge. The human operator couldn't bail out in time and she came out of it paralyzed. The shock of experiencing death through immersion is known from other incidents to prove fatal. But we have systems in place to short circuit —"

"What else?" she persisted.

"Well, there was one difficult episode. In the early days, when we had simple wire fences." The ExSpec shifted uneasily. "Some predators got in."

"What sort of predators?"

"A primate pack hunter, *Carnopapio grandis*. We call them raboons, genetically derived in an experiment two decades ago. They took baboon DNA —"

"How did they get in?" Kelly insisted.

"They're somewhat like a wild hog, with hooves that double as dig-

gers. Carnivores, though. They smelled game — our corralled animals. Dug under the fences.”

Kelly eyed the high, solid walls. “These are adequate?”

“Certainly. They’re from a genetic experiment. Someone tried to make a predator by raising the earlier baboon stock up onto two legs.”

Kelly said dryly, “Evolutionary gambling.”

Ruben didn’t catch the edge in her voice. “Like most bipedal predators, the forelimbs are shortened and the head carries forward, balanced by a thick tail they use for signalling to each other. They prey on the biggest herd animals, the gigantelope — another experiment — and eat only the richest meat.”

“Why attack humans, then?” she asked.

“They take targets of opportunity, too. Chimps, even. When they got into the compound, they went for adult humans, not children — a very selective strategy.”

Kelly shivered. “You look at all this very ... objectively.”

“I’m a biologist.”

“I never knew it could be so interesting,” Leon said to defuse her apprehension.

Ruben beamed. “Not as involving as higher mathematics, I’m sure.”

Kelly’s mouth twisted with wry skepticism. “Do you mind if guests carry weapons inside the compound?”

HE HAD A GLIMMERING OF AN IDEA ABOUT THE CHIMPS, A WAY to use their behaviors in building a simple toy model of sociohistory. He might be able to use the statistics of chimp troop movements, the ups and downs of their shifting fortunes.

He talked it over with Kelly and she nodded, but beneath it she seemed worried. Since Ruben’s remark she was always tut-tutting about safety. He reminded her that she had earlier urged him to do more immersions. “This is a vacation, remember?” he said more than once.

Her amused sidewise glances told him that she also didn’t buy his talk about the toy modeling. She thought he just liked romping in the woods. “A country boy at heart,” she chuckled.

So the next morning he skipped a planned trek to view the vast gigantelope herds. He went immediately to the immersion chambers and slipped under. To get some solid work done, he told himself.

THE CHIMPS SLEPT IN TREES AND SPENT PLENTY OF TIME GROOMING each other. For the lucky groomer a tick or louse was a treat. With enough, they could get high on some peppery-tasting alkaloid. He suspected the careful stroking and combing of his hair by Kelly was a behavior selected because it improved chimp hygiene. It certainly calmed Ipan, also.

Then it struck him: Chimps groomed rather than vocalizing. Only in crises and when agitated did they call and cry, mostly about breeding, feeding, or self-defense. They were like people who could not release themselves through the comfort of talk.

And they needed comfort. The core of their social life resembled human societies under stress — in tyrannies, in prisons, in city gangs. Nature red in tooth and claw, yet strikingly like troubled people.

But there were “civilized” behaviors here, too. Friendships, grief, sharing, buddies-in-arms who hunted and guarded turf together. Their old got wrinkled, bald, and toothless, yet were still cared for.

Their instinctive knowledge was prodigious. They knew how to make a bed of leaves as dusk fell, high up in trees. They could climb with grasping feet. They felt, cried, mourned — without being able to parse these into neat grammatical packages, so the emotions could be managed, subdued. Instead, emotions drove them.

Hunger was the strongest. They found and ate leaves, fruit, insects, even fair-sized animals. They loved caterpillars.

Each moment, each small enlightenment, sank him deeper into Ipan. He began to sense the subtle nooks and crannies of the chimp mind. Slowly, he gained more cooperative control.

That morning a female found a big tree and began banging it. The

hollow trunk boomed like a drum and all the foraging party rushed forward to beat it too, grinning wildly at the noise. Ipan joined in and Leon felt the burst of joy, seethed in it.

Later, coming on a waterfall after a heavy rain, they seized vines and swung among trees — out over the foaming water, screeching with joy as they performed twists and leaps from vine to vine. Like children in a new playground. Leon got Ipan to make impossible moves, wild tumbles and dives, propelling him forward with abandon — to the astonishment of the other chimps.

They were violent in their sudden, peevish moments — in hustling available females, in working out their perpetual dominance hierarchy, and especially in hunting. A successful hunt brought enormous excitement — hugging, kissing, pats. As the troop descended to feed the forest rang with barks, screeches, hoots, and pants. Leon joined the tumult, sang, danced with Sheelah/Kelly.

In some matters he had to restrain his feelings. Rats they ate head first. Larger game they smashed against rocks. They devoured the brains first, a steaming delicacy. Leon gulped — metaphorically, but with Ipan echoing the impulse — and watched, screening his reluctance. Ipan had to eat, after all.

At the scent of predators, he felt Ipan’s hair stand on end. Another, tangy bouquet made Ipan’s mouth water. He gave no mercy to food, even if it was still walking. Evolution in action; those chimps who had showed mercy in the past ate less and left fewer descendants. Those weren’t represented here any more.

For all its excesses, he found the chimps’ behavior hauntingly familiar. Males gathered often for combat, for pitching rocks, for blood sports, to work out their hierarchy. Females networked and formed alliances. There were trades of favors for loyalty, alliances, kinship bonds, turf wars, threats and displays, protection rackets, a hunger for “respect,” scheming subordinates, revenge — a social world enjoyed by many people that history had judged “great.” Much like an Emperor’s court, in fact.

Did people long to strip away their clothing and conventions, bursting forth as chimps?

Leon felt a flush of revulsion, so strong Ipan shook and fidgeted. Humanity’s lot *had* to be different, not this primitive horror.

He could use this, certainly, as a test bed for a full theory. Learn from our nearest genetic neighbors. *Then* humankind would be self-knowing, captains of themselves. He would build in the imperatives of the chimps, but go far beyond — to true, deep sociohistory.

“I DON’T SEE IT,” KELLY SAID AT DINNER.

“But they’re so much like us!” He put down his spoon. “We’re a brainy chimp — that’s a valuable insight. We can probably train them to work for us, do housekeeping.”

“I wouldn’t have them messing up *my* house.”

Adult humans weighed little more than chimps, but were far weaker. A chimp could lift five times more than a well-conditioned man. Human brains were three or four times more massive than a chimp’s. A human baby a few months old already had a brain larger than a grown chimp. People had different brain architecture, as well.

But was that the whole story? Give chimps bigger brains and speech, ease off on the testosterone, saddle them with more inhibitions, spruce them up with a shave and a haircut, teach them to stand securely on hind legs — and you had deluxe model chimps that would look and act rather human. They might pass in a crowd without attracting notice.

Leon said curtly, “Look, my point is that they’re close enough to us to make a sociohistory model work.”

“To make anybody believe that, you’ll have to show that they’re intelligent enough to have intricate interactions.”

“What about their foraging, their hunting?” he persisted.

“Ruben says they couldn’t even be trained to do work around this Excursion Station.”

“I’ll show you what I mean. Let’s master their methods together.”

“What method?”

“The basic one. Getting enough to eat.”

She bit into a steak of a meaty local grazer, suitably processed and

"fat-flensed for the fastidious urban palate," as the brochure had it. Chewing with unusual ferocity, she eyed him. "You're on. Anything a chimp can do, I can do better."

HELLY WAVED AT HIM FROM WITHIN SHEELAH. *LET THE CONTEST BEGIN.*

The troop was foraging. He let Ipan meander and did not try to harness the emotional ripples that lapped through the chimp mind. He had gotten better at it, but at a sudden smell or sound he could lose his grip. And guiding the blunt chimp mind through anything complicated was like moving a puppet with rubber strings.

Sheelah/Kelly waved and signed to him. *This way.*

They had worked out a code of a few hundred words, using finger and facial gestures, and their chimps seemed to go along with these fairly well. Chimps had a rough language, mixing grunts and shrugs and finger displays. These conveyed immediate meanings, but not in the usual sense of sentences. Mostly they just set up associations.

Tree, fruit, go. Kelly sent. They ambled their chimps over to a clump of promising spindly trunks, but the bark was too slick to climb.

The rest of the troop had not even bothered. *They have forest smarts we lack,* Leon thought ruefully.

What there? he signed to Sheelah/Kelly.

Chimps ambled up to mounds, gave them the once-over, and reached out to brush aside some mud, revealing a tiny tunnel. *Termites,* Kelly signed.

Leon analyzed the situation as chimps drifted in. Nobody seemed in much of a hurry. Sheelah winked at him and waddled over to a distant mound.

Apparently termites worked outside at night, then blocked the entrances at dawn. Leon let his chimp shuffle over to a large tan mound, but he was riding it so well now that the chimp's responses were weak. Leon/Ipan looked for cracks, knobs, slight hollows — and yet when he brushed away some mud, found nothing. Other chimps readily unmasked tunnels. Had they memorized the hundred or more tunnels in each mound?

He finally uncovered one. Ipan, was no help. Leon could control, but that blocked up the wellsprings of deep knowledge within the chimp.

The chimps deftly tore off twigs or grass stalks near their mounds. Leon carefully followed their lead. His twigs and grass didn't work. The first lot was too pliant, and when he tried to work them into a twisting tunnel, they collapsed and buckled. He switched to stiffer ones, but those caught on the tunnel walls, or snapped off. From Ipan came little help. Leon had managed him a bit too well.

He was getting embarrassed. Even the younger chimps had no trouble picking just the right stems or sticks. Leon watched a chimp nearby drop a stick that seemed to work. He then picked it up when the chimp moved on. He felt welling up from Ipan a blunt anxiety, mixing frustration and hunger. He could *taste* the anticipation of luscious, juicy termites.

He set to work, plucking the emotional strings of Ipan. This job went even worse. Vague thoughts drifted up from Ipan, but Leon was in control of the muscles now, and that was the bad part.

He quickly found that the stick had to be stuck in about ten centimeters, turning his wrist to navigate it down the twisty channel. Then he had to gently vibrate it. Through Ipan he sensed that this was to attract termites to bite into the stick.

At first he did it too long and when he drew the stick out it was half gone. Termites had bitten cleanly through it. So he had to search out another stick and that made Ipan's stomach growl.

The other chimps were through termite-snacking while Leon was still fumbling for his first taste. The nuances irked him. He pulled the stick out too fast, not turning it enough to ease it past the tunnel's curves. Time and again he fetched forth the stick, only to find that he had scraped the luscious termites off on the walls. Their bites punctured his stick, until it was so shredded he had to get another. The termites were dining better than he.

He finally caught the knack, a fluid slow twist of the wrist, grace-

fully extracting termites, clinging like bumps. Ipan licked them off eagerly. Leon liked the morsels, filtered through chimp taste buds.

Not many, though. Others of the troop were watching his skimpy harvest, heads tilted in curiosity, and he felt humiliated.

The hell with this, he thought.

He made Ipan turn and walk into the woods. Ipan resisted, dragging his feet. Leon found a thick limb, snapped it off to carrying size, and went back to the mound.

No more fooling with sticks. He whacked the mound solidly. Five more and he had punched a big hole. Escaping termites he scooped up by the delicious handful.

So much for subtlety! he wanted to shout. He tried writing a note for her in the dust but it was hard, forcing the letters out through his suddenly awkward hands. Chimps could handle a stick to fetch forth grubs, but marking a surface was somehow not a ready talent. He gave up.

Sheelah/Kelly came into view, proudly carrying a reed swarming with white-bellied termites. These were the best, a chimp gourmet delicacy. *I better,* she signed.

He made Ipan shrug and signed, *I got more.*

So it was a draw.

Later Kelly reported to him that among the troop he was known now as Big Stick. The name pleased him immensely.

AT DINNER HE FELT ELATED, EXHAUSTED, AND NOT IN THE MOOD FOR conversation. Being a chimp seemed to suppress his speech centers. It took some effort to ask ExSpec Ruben about immersion technology. Usually he accepted the routine techno-miracles, but understanding chimps meant understanding how he experienced them.

"The immersion hardware puts you in the middle of a chimp's posterior cingulate gyrus," Ruben said over dessert. "Just 'gyrus' for short. That's the brain's center for mediating emotions and expressing them through action."

"The brain?" Kelly asked. "What about ours?"

Ruben shrugged. "Same general layout. Chimps' are smaller, without a big cerebrum."

Leon leaned forward, ignoring his steaming cup of Kaf. "This 'gyrus', it doesn't give direct motor control?"

"No, we tried that. It disorients the chimp so much, when you leave, it can't get itself back together."

"So we're more subtle," Kelly said.

"We have to be. In chimp males, the pilot light is always on in neurons that control action and aggression —"

"That's why they're more violence-prone?" she asked.

"We think so. It parallels structures in our own brains."

"Really? Men's neurons?" Kelly looked doubtful.

"Human males have higher activity levels in their temporal limbic systems, deeper down in the brain — evolutionarily older structures."

"So why not put me into that level?" Leon asked.

"We place the immersion chips into the gyrus area because we can reach it from the top, surgically. The temporal limbic is way far down, impossible to implant a chip and net."

Kelly frowned. "So chimp males —"

"Are harder to control. Professor Mattick here is running his chimp from the back seat, so to speak."

"Whereas Kelly is running hers from a control center that, for female chimps, is more central?" Leon peered into the distance. "I was handicapped!"

Kelly grinned. "You have to play the hand you're dealt."

"It's not fair."

"Big Stick, biology is destiny."

THE TROOP CAME UPON ROTTING FRUIT. FEVERED EXCITEMENT RAN through them.

The smell was repugnant and enticing at the same time and at first he did not understand why. The chimps rushed to the over-ripe bulbs of blue and sickly green, popping open the skins, sucking out the juice.

Tentatively, Leon tried one. The hit was immediate. A warm feeling of well-being kindled up in him. Of course — the fruity esters had

converted into — alcohol! The chimps were quite deliberately setting about getting drunk.

He “let” his chimp follow suit. He hadn’t much choice in the matter.

Ipan grunted and thrashed his arms whenever Leon tried to turn him away from the teardrop fruit. And after a while, Leon didn’t want to turn away either. He gave himself up to a good, solid drunk. He had been worrying a lot lately, agitated in his chimp, and ... this was completely natural, wasn’t it?

Then a pack of raboons appeared, and he lost control of Ipan.

THEY COME FAST. RUNNING TWO-LEGS, NO SOUND. THEIR TAILS twitch, talking to each other.

Five circle left. They cut off Esa.

Biggest thunder at them. Hunker runs to nearest and it spikes him with its fore-puncher.

I throw rocks. Hit one. It yelps and scurries back. But others take its place. I throw again and they come and the dust and yowling are thick and the others of them have Esa. They cut her with their punch-claws. Kick her with sharp hooves

Three of them carry her off.

Our fems run, afraid. We warriors stay.

We fight them. Shrieking, throwing, biting when they get close. But we cannot reach Esa.

Then they go. Fast, running on their two hoofed legs.

Furling their tails in victory. Taunting us.

We feel bad. Esa was old and we loved her.

Fems come back, nervous. We groom ourselves and know that the two-legs are eating Esa somewhere.

Biggest come by, try to pat me. I snarl.

He Biggest! This thing he should have stopped.

His eyes get big and he slap me. I slap back at him. He slam into me. We roll around in dust. Biting, yowling. Biggest strong, strong and pound my head on ground.

Other warriors, they watch us, not join in.

He beat me. I hurt. I go away.

Biggest starts calming down the warriors. Fems come by and pay their respects to Biggest. Touch him, groom him, feel him the way he likes. He mounts three of them real quick. He feeling Biggest all right.

Me, I lick myself. Sheelah come groom me. After a while I feel better. Already forgotten Esa.

I not forget Biggest beat me though. In front of everybody. Now I hurt, Biggest get grooming.

He let them come and take Esa. He Biggest, he should stop them.

Some day I be all over him. On his back.

Some day I be Bigger.

“WHEN DID YOU BAIL OUT?” KELLY ASKED.

“After Biggest stopped pounding on me ... uh, on Ipan.”

They were relaxing in brilliant sun beside a swimming pool. The heady smells of the forest seemed to awaken in Leon the urge to be down there again, in the valleys of dust and blood. He trembled, took a deep breath. The fighting had been so involving he hadn’t wanted to leave, despite the pain. Immersion had a hypnotic quality.

“I know how you feel,” she said. “It’s easy to totally identify with them. I left Sheelah when those raboons came close. Pretty scary.”

“Why did anybody develop them?”

“Plans for using raboons as game, to hunt, Ruben said. Something new and challenging.”

“*Hunting?* Business will exploit any throwback primitivism to —” He had been about to launch into a little lecture on how far humanity had come, when he realized that he didn’t believe it any more. “Um.”

“You’ve always thought of people as cerebral. No sociohistory could work if it didn’t take into account our animal selves.”

“Our worst sins are all our own, I fear.” He had not expected that his experiences here would shake him so. This was sobering.

“Not at all.” Kelly gave him a lofty look. “I’ve been reading some of the Station background data on our room computer. Genocide occurs in wolves and chimps alike. Murder is widespread. Ducks and orangutans rape. Even *ants* have organized warfare and slave raids.

Chimps have at least as good a chance of being murdered as do humans, Ruben says. Of all the hallowed human hallmarks — speech, art, technology, and the rest — the one which comes most obviously from animal ancestors was genocide.”

“You’ve been learning from Ruben.”

“It was a good way to keep an eye on him.”

“Better to be suspicious than sorry?”

“Of course,” she said blandly. “Can’t let Africa soften our brains.”

“Well, luckily, even if we are super-chimps, throughout human society, communication blurs distinctions between Us and Them.”

“So?”

“That blunts the deep impulse to genocide.”

She laughed again, this time rather to his annoyance. “You haven’t understood history very well. Smaller groups still kill each other off with great relish. In Bosnia, during the reign of Omar the Impaler —”

“I concede, there are small scale tragedies by the dozens. But on the scale where sociohistory might work, averaging over populations of many millions —”

“What makes you so sure numbers are any protection?” she asked pointedly.

“Well — without further work, I have nothing to say.”

She smiled. “How uncharacteristic.”

“Until I have a real, working theory.”

“One that can allow for widespread genocide?”

He saw her point then. “You’re saying I really need this ‘animal nature’ part of humans.”

“I’m afraid so. ‘Civilized man’ is a contradiction in terms. Scheming, plots, Sheelah grabbing more meat for her young, Ipan wanting to do in Biggest — those things happen in fancy urban nations. They’re just better disguised.”

“I don’t follow.”

“People use their intelligence to hide motives. Consider ExSpec Ruben. He made a comment about your working on a ‘theory of history’ the other evening.”

“So?”

“Who told him you were?”

“I don’t think I — ah, you think he’s checking up on us?”

“He already knows.”

“We’re just tourists here.”

She graced him with an unreadable smile. “I do love your endless, naive way of seeing the world.”

Later, he couldn’t decide whether she had meant that as a compliment.

RUBEN INVITED HIM TO TRY A COMBAT-SPORT THE STATION OFFERED, and Leon accepted. It was an enhanced swordplay using levitation through electrostatic lifters. Leon was slow and inept. Using his own body against Ruben’s swift moves made him long for the sureness and grace of Ipan.

Ruben always opened with a traditional posture: one foot forward, his prod-sword making little circles in the air. Leon poked through Ruben’s defense sometimes, but usually spent all his lifter energy eluding Ruben’s thrusts. He did not enjoy it nearly as much as Ruben. The dry African air seemed to steal energy from him, too, whereas Ipan reveled in it.

He did learn bits and pieces about chimps from Ruben, and from trolling through the vast Station library. The man seemed a bit uneasy when Leon probed the data arrays, as though Ruben somehow owned them and any reader was a thief. Or at least that was what Leon took to be the origin of the unease.

He had never thought about animals very much, though he had grown up among them on the farm. Yet he came to feel that they, too, had to be understood.

Catching sight of itself in a mirror, a dog sees the image as another dog. So did cats, fish, or birds. After a while they get used to the harmless image, silent and smell-free, but they did not see it as themselves.

Human children had to be about two years old to do better.

Chimps took a few days to figure out that they were looking at themselves. Then they preened before it shamelessly, studied their

backs, and generally tried to see themselves differently, even putting leaves on their heads like hats and laughing at the result.

So they could do something other animals could not — get outside themselves, and look back.

They plainly lived in a world charged with echoes and reminiscences. Their dominance hierarchy was a frozen record of past coercion. They remembered termite mounds, trees to drum, useful spots where large water-sponge leaves fell, or grain matured.

All this fed into the toy model he had begun building in his notes — a chimp sociohistory. It used their movements, rivalries, hierarchies, patterns of eating, and mating and dying. Territory, resources, and troop competition for them. He found a way to factor into his equations the biological baggage of dark behaviors. Even the worst, like delight in torture and easy exterminations of other species for short term gain. All these the chimps had. Just like today's newspaper.

AT A DANCE THAT EVENING HE WATCHED THE CROWD WITH fresh vision.

Flirting was practice mating. He could see it in the sparkle of eyes, the rhythms of the dance. The warm breeze wafting up from the valley brought smells of dust, rot, life. An animal restlessness moved in the room.

He quite liked dancing and Kelly was a lush companion tonight. Yet he could not stop his mind from sifting, analyzing, taking the world before him apart into mechanisms.

The nonverbal template humans used for attract/approach strategies apparently descended from a shared mammalian heritage, Kelly had pointed out. He thought of that, watching the crowd at the bar.

A woman crosses a crowded room, hips swaying, eyes resting momentarily on a likely man, then coyly looking away just as she apparently notices his regard. A standard opening move: *Notice me.*

The second is *I am harmless.* A hand placed palm-up on a table or knee. A shoulder shrug, derived from an ancient vertebrate reflex, signifying helplessness. Combine that with a tilted head, which displays the vulnerability of the neck. These commonly appeared when two people drawn to each other have their first conversation — all quite unconsciously.

Such moves and gestures are subcortical, emerging far below in a swamp of primordial circuitry... which had survived until now, because it worked.

Did such forces shape history more than trade balances, alliances, treaties? He looked at his own kind and tried to see it through chimp eyes.

Though human females matured earlier, they did not go on to acquire coarse body hair, bony eye ridges, deep voices, or tough skin. Males did. And women everywhere strove to stay young-looking. Cosmetics makers freely admitted their basic role: *We don't sell products; we sell hope.*

Competition for mates was incessant. Male chimps sometimes took turns with females in estrus. They had huge testicles, implying that reproductive advantage had come to those males who produced enough to overwhelm their rivals' contributions. Human males had proportionally smaller testicles.

But humans got their revenge where it mattered. Of all primates, humans had the largest penises.

All primates had separated out as species many millions of years ago. In DNA-measured time, chimps lay six million years from humans. He mentioned to Kelly that only four percent of mammals formed pair bonds, were monogamous. Primates rated a bit higher, but not much. Birds were much better at it.

She sniffed. "Don't let all this biology go to your head."

"Oh no, I won't let it get that far."

"You mean it belongs in lower places?"

"Madam, you'll have to be the judge of that."

"Ah, you and your single-entendre humor."

Later that evening, with her, he had ample opportunity to reflect upon the truth that, while it was not always great to be human, it was tremendous fun being a mammal.

THEY SPENT A LAST DAY IMMERSING IN THEIR CHIMPS, SUNNING THEMSELVES beside a gushing stream. The plane would pick them up early the next morning; Helsinki waited. They packed and entered the immersion capsule and sank into a last reverie. Sun, sweet air, the latitude of the primitive ...

Until Biggest started to mount Sheelah.

Leon/Ipan sat up, his head foggy. Sheelah was shrieking at Biggest. She slapped him.

Biggest had mounted Sheelah before. Kelly had bailed out, her mind returning to her body in the capsule.

Something was different now. Ipan hurried over and signed to Sheelah, who was throwing pebbles at Biggest. *What?*

She moved her hands rapidly, signing *No go.*

She could not bail out. Something was wrong back at the capsule. He could go back himself, tell them.

Leon made the little mental flip that would bail him out.

Nothing happened.

He tried again. Sheelah threw dust and pebbles, backing away from Biggest. Nothing.

No time to think. He stepped between Sheelah and Biggest.

The massive chimp frowned. Here was Ipan, buddy Ipan, getting in the way. Denying him a fem. Biggest seemed to have forgotten the challenge and beating of the day before.

First he tried bellowing, eyes big and white. Then Biggest shook his arms, fists balled.

Leon made his chimp stand still. It took every calming impulse he could muster.

Biggest swung his fist like a club.

Ipan ducked. Biggest missed.

Leon was having trouble controlling Ipan, who wanted to flee. Sheets of fear shot up through the chimp mind, hot yellows in the blue-black depths.

Biggest charged forward, slamming Ipan back. Leon felt the jolt, a stabbing pain in his chest. He toppled backward. Hit hard.

Biggest yowled his triumph. Waved his arms at the sky.

Biggest would get on top, he saw. Beat him again.

Suddenly he felt a deep, raw hatred.

From that red seethe he felt his grip on Ipan tighten. He was riding both with and within the chimp, feeling its raw red fear, overrunning that with an iron rage. Ipan's own wrath fed back into Leon. The two formed a concert, anger building as if reflected from hard walls.

He might not be the same kind of primate, but he knew Ipan. Neither of them was going to get beaten again. And Biggest was not going to get Sheelah/Kelly.

He rolled to the side. Biggest hit the ground where he had been.

Ipan leaped up and kicked Biggest. Hard, in the ribs. Once, twice. Then in the head.

Whoops, cries, dust, pebbles — Sheelah was still bombarding them both. Ipan shivered with boiling energy and backed away.

Biggest shook his dusty head. Then he curled and rolled easily up to his feet, full of muscular grace, face a constricted mask. The chimp's eyes widened, showing white and red.

Ipan yearned to run. Only Leon's rage held him in place.

But it was a static balance of forces. Ipan blinked as Biggest shuffled warily forward, the big chimp's caution a tribute to the damage Ipan had inflicted.

I need some advantage, Leon thought, looking around. He could call for allies. Hunker paced nervously nearby.

Something told Leon that would be a losing strategy. Hunker was still a lieutenant to Biggest. Sheelah was too small to make a decisive difference. He looked at the other chimps, all chattering anxiously — and decided. He picked up a rock.

Biggest grunted in surprise. Chimps didn't use rocks against each other. Rocks were only for repelling invaders. He was violating a social code.

Biggest yelled, waved to the others, pounded the ground, huffed angrily. Then he charged.

Leon threw the rock hard. It hit Biggest in the chest, knocked him down.

Biggest came up fast, madder than before. Ipan scurried back, wanting desperately to run. Leon felt control slipping from him — and saw another rock. Suitable size, two paces back. He let Ipan turn to flee, then stopped and looked at the stone. Ipan didn't want to hold it. Panic ran through him.

Leon poured his rage into the chimp, forced the long arms down. Hands grabbed at the stone, fumbled, got it. Sheer anger made Ipan turn to face Biggest, who was thundering after him. To Leon, Ipan's arm came up in achingly slow motion. He leaned heavily into the pitch. The rock smacked Biggest in the face.

Biggest staggered. Blood ran into his eyes. Ipan caught the iron scent of it, riding on a prickly stench of outrage.

Leon made his trembling Ipan stoop down. There were some shaped stones nearby, made by the fems to trim leaves from branches. He picked up one with a chipped edge.

Biggest waved his head, dizzy.

Ipan glanced at the sober, still faces of his troop. No one had used a rock against a troop member, much less Biggest. Rocks were for Strangers.

A long, shocked silence stretched. The chimps stood rooted, Biggest grunted and peered in disbelief at the blood that spattered into his upturned hand.

Ipan stepped forward and raised the jagged stone, edge held outward. Crude, but a cutting edge.

Biggest flared his nostrils and came at Ipan. Ipan swept the rock through the air, barely missing Biggest's jaw.

Biggest's eyes widened. He huffed and puffed, threw dust, howled. Ipan simply stood with the rock and held his ground. Biggest kept up his anger-display for a long while, but he did not attack.

The troop watched with intense interest. Sheelah came and stood beside Ipan. It would have been against protocols for a female to take part in male dominance rituals.

Her movement signaled that the confrontation was over. But Hunker was having none of that. He abruptly howled, pounded the ground, and scooted over to Ipan's side.

Leon was surprised. With Hunker maybe he could hold the line against Biggest. He was not fool enough to think that this one stand-off would put Biggest to rest. There would be other challenges and he would have to fight them. Hunker would be a useful ally.

He realized that he was thinking in the slow, muted logic of Ipan himself. He *assumed* that the pursuit of chimp status-markers was a given, the great goal of his life.

This revelation startled him. He had known that he was diffusing into Ipan's mind, taking control of some functions from the bottom up, seeping through the deeply buried, walnut-sized gyrus. It had not occurred to him that the chimp would diffuse into *him*. Were they now married to each other in an interlocked web that dispersed mind and self?

Hunker stood beside him, eyes glaring at the other chimps, chest heaving. Ipan felt the same way, madly pinned to the moment. Leon realized that he would have to do something, break this cycle of dominance and submission which ruled Ipan at the deep, neurological level.

He turned to Sheelah. *Get out?* he signed.

No. No. Her chimp face wrinkled with anxiety.

Leave. He waved toward the trees, pointed to her, then him.

She spread her hands in a gesture of helplessness.

It was infuriating. He had so much to say to her and he had to funnel it through a few hundred signs. He chipped in a high-pitched voice, trying vainly to force the chimp lips and palate to do the work of shaping words.

It was no use. He had tried before, idly, but now he wanted to badly and none of the equipment worked. It couldn't. Evolution had shaped brain and vocal chords in parallel. Chimps groomed, people talked.

He turned back and realized that he had forgotten entirely about the status-setting. Biggest was glowering at him. Hunker stood guard, confused at his new leader's sudden loss of interest in the confrontation — and to gesture at a mere fem, too.

Leon reared up as tall as he could and waved the stone. This produced the desired effect. Biggest inched back a bit and the rest of the troop edged closer. Leon made Ipan stalk forward boldly. By this time

it did not take much effort, for Ipan was enjoying this enormously.

Biggest retreated. Fems inched around Biggest and approached Ipan. *If only I could leave him to the fems' delights*, Leon thought.

He tried to bail out again. Nothing. The mechanism wasn't working back at the Excursion Station. And something told him that it wasn't going to get fixed.

He gave the edged stone to Hunker. The chimp seemed surprised but took it. Leon hoped the symbolism of the gesture would penetrate in some fashion because he had no time left to spend on chimp politics. Hunker hefted the rock and looked at Ipan. Then he cried in a rolling, powerful voice, tones rich in joy and triumph.

Leon was quite happy to let Hunker distract the troop. He took Sheelah by the arm and led her into the trees. No one followed.

He was relieved. If another chimp had tagged along, it would have confirmed his suspicions. Ruben might be keeping track.

Still, he reminded himself, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

THE HUMANS CAME SWIFTLY, WITH CLATTER AND BOOMS.

He and Sheelah had been in the trees a while. At Leon's urging they had worked their way a few clicks away from the troop. Ipan and Sheelah showed rising anxiety at being separated from their troop. His teeth chattered and eyes jerked anxiously at every suspicious movement. This was natural, for isolated chimps were far more vulnerable.

The humans landing did not help.

Danger, Leon signed, cupping an ear to indicate the noise of fliers landing nearby.

Sheelah signed, *Where go?*

Away.

She shook her head vehemently. *Stay here. They get us.*

They would indeed, but not in the sense she meant. Leon cut her off curtly, shaking his head. *Danger*. They had never intended to convey complicated ideas with their signs and now he felt bottled up, unable to tell her his suspicions.

Leon made a knife-across-throat gesture. Sheelah frowned.

He bent down and made Ipan take a stick. In soft loam he wrote: IMPERIAL INDUSTRIE AGENTS. WANT US DEAD.

Sheelah looked dumbfounded. Kelly had probably been operating under the assumption that the failure to bail out was a temporary error. It had lasted too long for that. The landing of people in noisy, intrusive fashion confirmed his hunch. No ordinary team would disturb the animals so much. And nobody would come after them directly. They would fix the immersion apparatus, where the real problem was.

THEY KEEP US HERE, KILL US, BLAME ON ANIMALS.

He had better arguments to back up his case, the slow accumulation of small details in Ruben's behavior. That, and the guess that letting them die in an "accident" while immersed in a chimp was plausible enough to escape an investigation.

The humans went about their noisy business. They were enough, though, to make his case. Sheelah's eyes narrowed, the big brow scowled. *Where?* she signed.

He had no sign for so abstract an idea, so he scribbled with the stick, *AWAY*. Indeed, he had no plan.

I'LL CHECK, she wrote in the dirt. She set off toward the noise of humans deploying on the valley floor below. To a chimp the din was a dreadful clanking irritation. Leon was not going to let her out of his sight. He followed her. She waved him back but he shook his head and stuck behind her. She gave up and let him follow.

They stayed in bushes until they could get a view of the landing party below. A skirmish line was forming up a few hundred meters away. They were encircling the area where the troop had been. Leon squinted. Chimp eyesight was not good for distance. Humans had been hunters once, and one could tell by the eyes alone.

He thought abstractly about the fact that nearly everybody needed eye aids by the age of forty. Either civilization was hard on eyes, or maybe humans in prehistory had not lived long enough for eye trouble to rob them of game. Either conclusion was sobering.

The two chimps watched the humans calling to one another and

in the middle of them Leon saw Ruben. That confirmed it. That, and that each man and woman carried a weapon.

Beneath his fear he felt something strong, dark.

Ipan trembled, watching humans, a strange awe swelling in his mind. Humans seemed impossibly tall in the shimmering distance, moving with stately, swaying elegance.

Leon floated above the surge of emotion, fending off its powerful effects. The reverence for those distant, tall figures came out of the chimp's dim past.

That surprised him until he thought it over. After all, animals were reared and taught by adults much smarter and stronger. Most species were like chimps, spring-loaded by evolution to work in a dominance hierarchy. Awe was adaptive.

When they met lofty humans with overwhelming power, able to mete out punishment and rewards — literally life and death — something like religious fervor arose in them. Dim, fuzzy, but strong.

Atop that warm, tropical emotion floated a sense of satisfaction at simply *being*. His chimp was happy to be a chimp, even when seeing a being of clearly superior power and thought.

Ironic, Leon thought. His chimp had just disproved another supposedly human earmark: their self-congratulatory distinction of being the only animal that congratulated itself.

He jerked himself out of his abstractions. How human, to ruminate even when in mortal danger.

CAN'T FIND US ELECTRONICALLY, he scratched in the sand.

MAYBE RANGE IS SHORT, she wrote.

RUBEN SABOTAGED LINK, he printed. She bit her lip, nodded.

Go. We go. he signed.

Sheelah nodded and they crept quickly away. Ipan was reluctant to leave the presence of the revered humans, his steps dragging.

THEY USED CHIMP MODES OF PATROLLING. HE AND KELLY LET their chimps take over, experts at silent movement, careful of every twig. Once they had left the humans behind the chimps grew even more cautious. Chimps had few enemies but the faint scent of a single predator could change the feel of every moment in the wild.

Ipan climbed tall trees and sat for hours surveying open land ahead before venturing forth. He weighed the evidence of pungent droppings, faint prints, bent branches.

They angled down the long slope of the valley and kept in the forest. Leon had only glanced at the big color-coded map of the area all guests received and had trouble recalling much of it. Once he recognized one of the distant, beak-shaped peaks he got his bearings. Kelly spotted a stream snaking down into the main river and that gave them further help, but still they did not know which way lay the Excursion Station. Or how far.

That way? Leon signed, pointing over the distant ridge.

No. That. Kelly insisted.

Far, not.

Why?

The worst part of it all was that they could not talk. He could not say clearly that the technology of immersion worked best at reasonably short range, less than a hundred clicks, say. And it made sense to keep the subject chimps within easy flier distance. Certainly Ruben and the others had gotten to the troop quickly.

Is. He persisted.

Not. She pointed down the valley. Maybe there.

He could only hope Kelly got the general idea. Their signs were scanty and he began to feel a broad, rising irritation. Chimps felt and sensed strongly, but they were so *limited*.

Ipan expressed this by tossing limbs and stones, banging on tree trunks. It didn't help much. The need to speak was like a pressure he could not relieve and Kelly felt it too. Sheelah chirped and grunted in frustration.

Beneath his mind he felt the smoldering presence of Ipan. They had never been together this long before and urgency welled up

between the two canted systems of mind. Their uneasy marriage was showing greater strains.

Sit. Quiet. She did. He cupped a hand to his ear.

Bad come?

No. Listen — In frustration Leon pointed to Sheelah herself. Blank incomprehension in the chimp's face. He scribbled in the dust, LEARN FROM CHIMPS. Sheelah's mouth opened and she nodded.

They squatted in the shelter of prickly bushes and listened to the sounds of the forest. Scurryings and murmurs came through strongly as Leon relaxed his grip on the chimp. Dust hung in slanted cathedral light, pouring down from the forest canopy in rich yellow shafts. Scents curled up from the forest floor, chemical messengers telling Ipan of potential foods, soft loam for resting, bark to be chewed. Leon gently lifted Ipan's head to gaze across the valley at the peaks ... musing ... and felt a faint tremor of resonance.

To Ipan the valley came weighted with significance beyond words. His troop had imbued it with blunt emotions, attached to clefts where a friend fell and died, where the troop found a hoard of fruits, where they met and fought two big cats. It was an intricate landscape suffused with feeling, the chimp mechanism of memory.

Leon faintly urged Ipan to think beyond the ridge line and felt in response a diffuse anxiety. He bore in on that kernel — and an image burst into Ipan's mind, fringed in fear. A rectangular bulk framed against a cool sky. The Excursion Station.

There. He pointed for Kelly.

Ipan had simple, strong, apprehensive memories of the place. His troop had been taken there, outfitted with the implants which allowed them to be ridden, then deposited back in their territory.

Far. Kelly signed.

We go?

Hard. Slow.

No stay here. They catch.

Kelly looked as skeptical as a chimp could look. Fight?

Did she mean fight Ruben here? Or fight once they reached the Excursion Station? No here. There.

Kelly frowned but accepted this. He had no real plan, only the idea that Ruben was ready for chimps out here, and might not be so prepared for them at the Station. There he and Kelly might gain the element of surprise. How, he had no idea.

They studied each other, each trying to catch a glimmer of the other in an alien face. She stroked his ear lobe, Kelly's fond calming gesture. Sure enough, it made him tingle. But he could say so little The moment crystallized for him the hopelessness of their situation.

Ruben plainly was trying to kill Leon and Kelly through Ipan and Sheelah. What would become of their own bodies? The shock of experiencing death through immersion was known to prove fatal. Their bodies would fail from neurological shock, without ever regaining consciousness.

He saw a tear run down Sheelah's cheek. She knew how hopeless matters were, too. He swept her up in his arms and, looking at the distant mountains, was surprised to find tears in his own eyes as well.

HE HAD NOT COUNTED ON THE RIVER. MEN, ANIMALS — THESE PROBLEMS he had considered. They ventured down to the surging waters where the forest gave the nearest protection and the stream broadened, making the best place to ford.

But the hearty river that chuckled and frothed down the valley was impossible to swim.

Or rather, for Ipan to swim. Leon had been coaxing his chimp onward, carefully pausing when his muscles shook or when he wet himself from anxiety. Kelly was having similar trouble and it slowed them. A night spent up in high branches soothed both chimps, but now at mid-morning all the stressful symptoms returned, as Ipan put one foot into the river. Cool, swift currents.

Ipan danced back onto the narrow beach, yelping in dread.

Go? Kelly/Sheelah signed.

Leon calmed his chimp and they tried to get it to attempt swimming. Sheelah displayed only minor anxiety. Leon plumbed the

swampy depths of Ipan's memory and found a cluster of distress, centered around a dim remembrance of nearly drowning when a child. When Sheelah helped him he fidgeted, then bolted from the water again.

Go! Sheelah waved long arms upstream and downstream and shook her head angrily.

Leon guessed that she had reasonably clear chimp-memories of the river, which had no easier crossings than this. He shrugged, lifted his hands palm up.

A big herd of gigantelope grazed nearby and some were crossing the river for better grass beyond. They tossed their great heads, as if mocking the chimps. The river was not deep but to Ipan it was a wall. Leon, trapped by Ipan's solid fear, seethed and could do nothing.

Sheelah paced the shore. She huffed in frustration and looked at the sky, squinting. Her head snapped around in surprise. Leon followed her gaze. A flier was swooping down the valley, coming this way.

Ipan beat Sheelah to the shelter of trees, but not by much. Luckily the gigantelope herd provided a distraction for the flyer. They cowered in bushes as the machine hummed overhead in a circular search pattern. Leon had to quell Ipan's mounting apprehension by envisioning scenes of quiet and peace and food while he and Sheelah groomed each other.

The flier finally went away. They would have to minimize their exposure on open grasslands now.

They foraged for fruit. His mind revolved uselessly and a sour depression settled over him. He was quite neatly caught in a trap, a pawn in politics. Worse, Kelly was in it, too. He was no man of action. *Nor a chimp of action, either*, he thought dourly.

As he brought a few over-ripe bunches of fruit back to their bushes overlooking the river, he heard cracking noises. He crouched down and worked his way uphill and around the splintering sounds. Sheelah was stripping branches from the trees. When he approached she waved him on impatiently, a common chimp gesture remarkably like a human one.

She had a dozen thick branches lined up on the ground. She went to a nearby spindly tree and peeled bark from it in long strips. The noise made Ipan uneasy. Predators would be curious at this unusual sound. He scanned the forest for danger.

Sheelah came over to him, slapped him in the face. She wrote with a stick on the ground RAFT.

Leon felt particularly stupid as he pitched in. Of course. Had his chimp immersion made him more stupid? Did the effect worsen with time? Even if he got out of this, would he be the same? Many questions, no answers. He forgot about them and worked.

They lashed branches together with bark, crude but serviceable. They found two small fallen trees and used them to anchor the edge of the raft. I, Sheelah pointed, and demonstrated pulling the raft.

First, a warm-up. Ipan liked sitting on the raft in the bushes. Apparently the chimp could not see the purpose of the raft yet. Ipan stretched out on the deck of saplings and gazed up into the trees as they swished in the warm winds.

They carried the awkward plane of branches down to the river after another mutual grooming session. The sky was filled with birds but he could see no fliers.

They hurried. Ipan was skeptical about stepping onto the raft when it was halfway into the water, but Leon called up memories filled with warm feeling, and this calmed the quick-tripping heart he could feel knocking in the chimp veins.

Ipan sat gingerly on the branches. Sheelah cast off.

She pushed hard but the river swept them quickly downstream. Alarm spurled in Ipan.

Leon made Ipan close his eyes. That slowed the breathing, but anxiety skittered across the chimp mind like heat lightning forking before a storm. The raft's rocking motion actually helped, making Ipan concentrate on his queasy stomach. Once his eyes flew open when a floating log smacked into the raft, but the dizzying sight of water all around made him squeeze them tight immediately.

Leon wanted to help her, but he knew from the trip-hammer beating of Ipan's heart that panic hovered near. He could not even see how

she was doing. He had to sit blind and feel her shoving the raft along.

She panted noisily, struggling to keep it pointed against the river's tug. Spray splashed onto him. Ipan jerked, yelped, pawed anxiously with his feet, as if to run.

A sudden lurch. Sheelah's grunt cut off with a gurgle and he felt the raft spin away on rising currents. A sickening spin ...

Ipan jerked clumsily to his feet. Eyes jumped open.

Swirling water, the raft unsteady. He looked down and the branches were coming apart. Panic consumed him. Leon tried to promote soothing images but they blew away before winds of fright.

Sheelah came paddling after the raft but it was picking up speed. Leon made Ipan gaze at the far shore but that was all he could do before the chimp started yelping and scampering on the raft, trying to find a steady place.

It was no use. The branches broke free of their bindings and chilly water swept over the deck. Ipan screamed. He leaped, fell, rolled, jumped up again.

Leon gave up any idea of control. The only hope lay in seizing just the right moment. The raft split down the middle and his half veered heavily to the left. Ipan started away from the edge and Leon fed that, made the chimp step further. In two bounds he took the chimp off the deck and into the water — toward the far shore.

Ipan gave way then to pure blind panic. Leon let the legs and arms thrash — but to each he gave a push at the right moment. He could swim, Ipan couldn't.

The near-aimless flailing held Ipan's head out of water most of the time. It even gained a little headway. Leon kept focused on the convulsive movements, ignoring the cold water — and then Sheelah was there, her jaws agape.

She grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and shoved him toward shore. Ipan tried to grapple with her, climb up her. Sheelah socked him in the jaw. He gasped. She pulled him toward shore.

Ipan was stunned. This gave Leon a chance to get the legs moving in a thrusting stroke. He worked at it, single-minded among the rush and gurgle, chest heaving ... and after a seeming eternity, felt pebbles beneath his feet. Ipan scrambled up onto the rocky beach on his own.

He let the chimp slap himself and dance to warm up. Sheelah emerged dripping and bedraggled and Ipan swept her up in his thankful arms.



UNALKING WAS WORK AND IPAN WASN'T HAVING ANY.

Leon tried to make the chimp cover ground, but now they had to ascend difficult gullies, some mossy and rough. They stumbled, waded, climbed and sometimes just crawled up the slopes of the valley. The chimps found animal trails, which helped a bit.

Ipan stopped often for food or just to gaze idly into the distance. Soft thoughts flitted like moths through the foggy mind, buoyant on liquid emotional flows which eddied to their own pulse.

Chimps were not made for extended projects. They made slow progress. Night came and they had to climb trees, snagging fruit on the way.

Ipan slept, but Leon did not. Could not.

Their lives were just as much at risk here as the chimps', but the slumbering minds he and Kelly attended had always lived this way. To the chimps, the forest night seeped through as a quiet rain of information, processed as they slept. Their minds keyed vagrant sounds to known non-threats, leaving slumber intact.

Leon did not know the subtle signs of danger and so mistook every rustle and tremor in the branches as danger approaching on soft feet. Sleep came against his will.

In dawn's first pale glow Leon awoke with a snake beside him. It coiled like a green rope around a descending branch, getting itself into striking position. It eyed him and Leon tensed.

Ipan drifted up from his own profound slumber. He saw the snake but did not react with a startled jerk, as Leon feared he might.

A long moment passed between them and Ipan blinked just once. The snake became utterly motionless and Ipan's heart quickened but

he did not move. Then the snake uncoiled and glided away, and the unspoken transaction was done. Ipan was unlikely prey, this green snake did not taste good, and chimps were smart enough to be about other business.

When Sheelah awoke they went down to a nearby chuckling stream for a drink, scavenging leaves and a few crunchy insects on the way. Both chimps nonchalantly peeled away fat black land leeches which had attached to them in the night. The thick, engorged worms sickened Leon, but Ipan pulled them off with the same casualness Leon would have retying loosened shoe laces.

Ipan drank and Leon reflected that the chimp felt no need to clean himself. Normally Leon showered twice a day, before breakfast and before dinner, and felt ill at ease if he sweated, but here he wore the shaggy body comfortably. Had his frequent cleansings been a health measure, like the chimps' grooming? Or a rarified, civilized habit? He dimly remembered that as a boy he had gone for days in happy, sweaty pleasure, and had disliked baths and showers. Somehow Ipan returned him to a simpler sense of self, at ease in the grubby world.

His comfort did not last long. They sighted raboons uphill.

Ipan had picked up the scent, but Leon did not have access to the part of the chimp brain that made scent-picture associations. He had only known that something disturbed Ipan, wrinkling the knobby nose. The sight at short range jolted him.

Thick hindquarters, propelling them in brisk steps. Short forelimbs, ending in sharp claws. Their large heads seemed to be mostly teeth, sharp and white above slitted, wary eyes. A thick brown pelt covered them, growing bushy in the heavy tail they used for balance.

Days before, from the safety of a high tree, Ipan had watched some rip and devour the soft tissues of a gigantelope out on the grasslands. These came sniffing, working down slope in a skirmish line, five of them. Sheelah and Ipan trembled at the sight. They were downwind of the raboons and so beat a retreat in silence.

There were no tall trees here, just brush and saplings. Leon and Sheelah angled away downhill and got some distance, and then saw ahead a clearing. Ipan picked up the faint tang of other chimps, wafting from across the clearing.

He waved to her: *Go*. At the same moment chorus rose behind them. The raboons had smelled them.

Their wheezing grunts came echoing through the thick bushes. Down the slope there was even less cover, but bigger trees lay beyond. They could climb those.

Ipan and Sheelah hurried across the broad tan clearing on all fours but they were not quick. Snarling raboons burst into the grass behind them. Leon scampered into the trees — and directly into the midst of a chimp troop.

There were several dozen, startled and blinking. He yelled incoherently, wondering how Ipan would signal to them.

The nearest large male turned, bared teeth, and shrieked angrily. The entire pack took up the call, whooping and snatching up sticks and rocks, throwing them — at Ipan. A pebble hit him on the chin, a branch on the thigh. He fled, Sheelah already a few steps ahead of him.

The raboons came charging across the clearing. In their claws they held small, sharp stones. They looked big and solid but they slowed at the barrage of screeches and squawks coming from the trees.

Ipan and Sheelah burst out into the grass of the clearing and the chimps came right after them. The raboons skidded to a halt.

The chimps saw the raboons but they did not stop or even slow. They still came after Ipan and Sheelah with murderous glee.

The raboons stood frozen, their claws working uneasily.

Leon realized what was happening and picked up a branch as he ran, calling hoarsely to Sheelah. She saw and copied him. He ran straight at the raboons, waving the branch. It was an awkward, twisted old limb, useless, but it looked big. Leon wanted to seem like the advance guard of some bad business.

In the rising cloud of dust and general chaos the raboons saw a large party of enraged chimps emerging from the forest. They bolted.

Squealing, they ran at full stride into the far trees.

Ipan and Sheelah followed, running with the last of their strength. By the time Ipan reached the first trees, he looked back and the

chimps had stopped halfway, still screeching their vehemence.

He signed to Sheelah, *Go*, and they cut away at a steep angle, heading uphill.

PAN NEEDED FOOD AND REST TO STOP HIS HEART FROM LURCHING at every minor sound. Sheelah and Ipan clutched each other, high in a tree, and crooned and petted.

Leon needed time to think. Who was keeping their bodies alive at the Station? It would be smart to let them stay out here, in danger, saying to the rest of the staff that the two odd tourists wanted a really long immersion.

His thinking triggered jitters in Ipan, so he dropped that mode. Better to think abstractly. And there was plenty out here that needed understanding.

The biotechnicians who planted chimps and gigantelope and the rest here had tinkered with the raboons. The wild days of explosive biotech, in the first years of the twencen, had allowed just about anything. Capabilities soon thereafter, in the twenties, had allowed the biotech tinkerers to see if they could turn a more distant primate relative, the baboon, into something like humans. A perverse goal, it seemed to Leon, but believable. Scientists loved to monkey with matters.

The work had gotten as far as pack-hunting behavior. But raboons had no tools beyond crudely edged stones, occasionally used to cut meat once they had brought it down.

In another few million years, under evolution's raw rub, they might be as smart as chimps. Who would go extinct then?

At the moment he didn't much care. He had felt real rage when the chimps — *his own kind!* — had turned against them, even when the raboons came within view. Why?

He worried at the issue, sure there was something here he had to understand. Sociohistory had to deal with such basic, fundamental impulses. The chimps' reaction had been uncomfortably close to myriad incidents in human history. *Hate the Stranger*.

He had to fathom that murky truth.

Chimps moved in small groups, disliking outsiders, breeding mostly within their modest circle of a few dozen. This meant that any genetic trait that emerged could pass swiftly into all the members, through inbreeding. If it helped the band survive, the rough rub of chance would select for that band's survival. Fair enough.

But the trait had to be undiluted. A troop of especially good rock throwers would get swallowed up if they joined a company of several hundred. Contact would make them breed outside the original small clan. Out-breeding: Their genetic heritage would get watered down.

Striking a balance between the accidents of genetics in small groups, and the stability of large groups — that was the trick. Some lucky troop might have fortunate genes, conferring traits that fit the next challenge handed out by the ever-altering world. They would do well. But if those genes never passed to many chimps, what did it matter?

With some small amount of out-breeding, that trait got spread into other bands. Down through the strainer of time, others picked up the trait. It spread.

This meant it was actually *helpful* to develop smoldering animosity to outsiders, an immediate sense of their wrongness. *Don't breed with them*.

So small bands held fast to their eccentric traits, and some prospered. Those lived on; most perished. Evolutionary jumps happened faster in small, semi-isolated bands which out-bred slightly. They kept their genetic assets in one small basket, the troop. Only occasionally did they mate with another troop — often, through rape.

The price was steep: a strong preference for their own tiny lot.

They hated crowds, strangers, noise. Bands of less than ten were too vulnerable to disease or predators; a few losses and the group failed. Too many, and they lost the concentration of close breeding. They were intensely loyal to their group, easily identifying each other in the dark by smell, even at great distances. Because they had many common genes, altruistic actions were common.

They even honored heroism — for even if the hero died, his shared genes were passed on through his relatives.

Even if strangers could pass the tests of difference in appearances, manner, smell, grooming — even then, culture could amplify the effects. Newcomers with different language or habits and posture would seem repulsive. Anything that served to distinguish a band would help keep hatreds high.

Each small genetic ensemble would then be driven by natural selection to stress the non-inherited differences — even arbitrary ones, dimly connected to survival fitness ... and so they could evolve culture. As humans had.

Diversity in their tribal intricacies avoided genetic watering down. They heeded the ancient call of aloof, wary tribalism.

Leon/Ipan shifted uneasily. Midway through his thinking, the word *they* had come in Leon's thinking to mean humans as well as chimps. The description fit both.

That was the key. Humans fit into civilization *despite* their innate tribalism, their chimp-like heritage. It was a miracle!

But even miracles called out for explanation. How could civilization possibly have kept itself stable, using such crude creatures as humans? Leon had never seen the issue before in such glaring, and humbling, light.

And he had no answer.

THEY MOVED ON AGAINST THE BLUNT, DEEP UNEASE OF their chimps.

Ipan smelled something that sent his eyes darting left and right. With the full tool kit of soothing thoughts and the subtle tricks he had learned, Leon kept him going.

Sheelah was having more trouble. The female chimp did not like laboring up the long, steep gullies that approached the ridge line. Gnarled bushes blocked their way and it took time to work their way around. Fruit was harder to find at these altitudes.

Ipan's shoulders and arms ached constantly. Chimps walked on all fours because their immensely strong arms carried a punishing weight penalty. To navigate both trees and ground meant you could optimize neither. Sheelah and Ipan groaned and whined at the soreness that never left feet, legs, wrists, and arms. Chimps would never be far-ranging explorers.

Together they let their chimps pause often to crumble leaves and soak up water from tree holes, a routine, simple tool use. They kept sniffing the air, apprehensive.

The smell that disturbed both chimps got stronger, darker.

Sheelah went ahead and was the first over the ridge line. Far below in the valley they could make out the rectangular rigidities of the Excursion Station. A flier lifted from the roof and whispered away down the valley, no danger to them.

He recalled a century ago sitting on the veranda there with drinks in hand and Kelly saying, *If you stayed in Helsinki you might be dead.* Also if you didn't stay in Helsinki ...

They started down the steep slope. Their chimps' eyes jerked at every unexpected movement. A chilly breeze stirred the few low bushes and twisted trees. Some had a feathered look, burnt and shattered by lightning. Air masses driven up from the valleys fought along here, the brute clash of pressures. This rocky ridge was far from the comfortable province of chimps. They hurried.

Ahead, Sheelah stopped.

Without a sound, five raboons rose from concealment, forming a neat half-circle around them.

Leon could not tell if it was the same pack as before. If so, they were quite considerable pack hunters, able to hold memory and purpose over time. They had waited ahead, where there were no trees to climb.

The raboons were eerily quiet as they strode forward, their claws clicking softly.

He called to Sheelah and made some utterly fake ferocious noises as he moved, arms high in the air, fists shaking, showing a big profile. He let Ipan take over while he thought.

A raboon band could certainly take two isolated chimps. To survive this they had to surprise the raboons, frighten them.

He looked around. Throwing rocks wasn't going to do the trick

here. With only a vague notion of what he was doing he shuffled left, toward a tree that had been splintered by lightning.

Sheelah saw his move and got there first, striding energetically. Ipan picked up two stones and flung them at the nearest raboon. One caught him on the flank but did no real harm.

The raboons began to trot, circling. They called to each other in wheezing grunts.

Sheelah leaped on a dried-out shard of the tree. It snapped. She snatched it up and Leon saw her point. It was as tall as she was and she cradled it.

The largest raboon grunted and they all looked at each other.

The raboons charged.

The nearest one came at Sheelah. She caught it on the shoulder with the blunt point and it squealed.

Leon grabbed a stalk of the shattered tree trunk. He could not wrench it free. Another squeal from behind him and Sheelah was gibbering in a high, frightened voice.

It was best to let the chimps release tension vocally, but he could feel the fear and desperation in the tones and knew it came from Kelly, too.

He carefully selected a smaller shard of the tree. With both hands he twisted it free, using his weight and big shoulder muscles, cracking it so that it came away with a point.

Lances. That was the only way to stay away from the raboon claws. Chimps never used such advanced weapons. Evolution hadn't gotten around to that lesson yet.

The raboons were all around them now. He and Sheelah stood back to back. He barely got his feet placed when he had to take the rush of a big, swarthy raboon.

They had not gotten the idea of the lance yet. It slammed into the point, jerked back. A fearsome bellow. Ipan wet himself with fear but something in Leon kept him in control.

The raboon backed off, whimpering. It turned to run. In mid-stride it stopped. For a long, suspended moment the raboon hesitated — then turned back toward Leon.

It trotted forward with new confidence. The other raboons watched. It went to the same tree Leon had used and with a single heave broke off a long, slender spike of wood. Then it came toward Leon, stopped, and with one claw held the stick forward. With a toss of its big head it looked at him and half-turned, putting one foot forward.

With a shock Leon recognized the swordplay position. Ruben had used it. Ruben was riding this raboon.

It made perfect sense. This way the chimps' deaths would be quite natural. Ruben could say that he was developing raboon-riding as a new commercial application of the same hardware that worked for chimp-riding.

Ruben came forward a careful step at a time, holding the long lance between two claws now. He made the end move in a circle. Movement was jerky; claws were crude, compared with chimp hands. But the raboon was stronger.

It came at him with a quick feint, then a thrust. Leon barely managed to dodge sideways while he brushed the lance aside with his stick. Ruben recovered quickly and came from Leon's left. Jab, feint, jab, feint. Leon caught each with a swoop of his stick.

Their wooden swords snacked against each other and Leon hoped his didn't snap. Ruben had good control of his raboon. It did not try to flee as it had before.

Leon was kept busy slapping aside Ruben's thrusts. He had to have some other advantage or the superior strength of the raboon would eventually tell. Leon circled, drawing Ruben away from Sheelah. The other raboons were keeping her trapped, but not attacking. All attention riveted on the two figures as they poked and parried.

Leon drew Ruben toward an outcropping. The raboon was having trouble holding its lance straight and had to keep looking down at its claws to get them right. This meant it paid less attention to where its two hooves found their footing. Leon slapped and jabbed and kept moving, making the raboon step sideways. It put a big hoof down among some angular stones, teetered, then recovered.

Leon moved left. It stepped again and its hoof turned and it stumbled. Leon was on it in an instant. He thrust forward as the raboon

looked down, feet scrambling for purchase. Leon caught the raboon full with his point.

He pushed hard. The other raboons let out a moaning.

Snorting in rage, the raboon tried to get off the point. Leon made Ipan step forward and thrust the tip into the raboon. The thing wailed hoarsely. Ipan plunged again. Blood spurted from it, splattering the dust. Its knees buckled and it sprawled.

Leon shot a glance over his shoulder. The others had surged into action. Sheelah was holding off three, screeching at them so loudly it unnerved even him. She had already wounded one. Blood dripped down its brown coat.

But the others did not charge. They circled and growled and stamped their feet, but came no closer. They were confused. Learning, too. He could see the quick, bright eyes studying the situation, this fresh move in the perpetual war.

Sheelah stepped out and poked the nearest raboon. It launched itself at her in a snarling fit and she stuck it again, deeper. It yelped and turned — and ran.

That did it for the others. They all trotted off, leaving their fellow bleating on the ground. Its dazed eyes watched its blood trickle out. Its eyes flickered and Ruben was gone. The animal slumped.

With deliberation Leon picked up a rock and bashed in the skull. It was messy work and he sat back inside Ipan and let the dark, smoldering chimp anger come out.

He bent over and studied the raboon brain. A fine silvery webbing capped the rubbery, convoluted ball. Immersion circuitry.

He turned away from the sight and only then saw that Sheelah was hurt.

THE STATION CROWNED A RUGGED HILL. STEEP GULLIES GAVE the hillside the look of a weary, lined face. Wiry bushes thronged the lower reaches.

Ipan puffed as he worked his way through the raw land cut by erosion. In chimp vision the night was eerie, a shimmering vista of pale greens and blue-tinged shadows. The hill was a nuance in the greater slope of a grand mountain, but chimp vision could not make out the distant features. Chimps lived in a close, immediate world.

Ahead he could see clearly the glowing blank wall ringing the Station. Massive, five meters tall. And, he remembered from his tourist tour of the place, rimmed with broken glass.

Behind him came gasps as Sheelah labored up the slope.

The wound in her side made her gait stiff, face rigid. She refused to hide below. They were both near exhaustion and their chimps were balky, despite two stops for fruit and grubs and rest.

Through their feeble vocabulary, their facial grimacing and writing in the dust, they had "discussed" the possibilities. Two chimps were vulnerable out here. They could not expect to be as lucky as with the raboons, not tired out and in strange territory.

The best time to approach the Station was at night. And whoever had engineered this would not wait forever. They had hidden from fliers twice more this last day. Resting through the next day was an inviting option, but Leon felt a foreboding press him onward.

He angled up the hillside, watching for electronic trip wires. Of such technical matters he knew nothing. He would have to keep a lookout for the obvious and hope that the Station was not wired for thinking trespassers. Chimp vision was sharp and clear in dim light for nearby objects, but he could find nothing.

He chose a spot by the wall shadowed by trees. Sheelah panted in shallow gasps as she approached. Looking up, the wall seemed immense. Impossible

Slowly he surveyed the land around them. No sign of any movement. The place smelled peculiar to Ipan, somehow *wrong*. Maybe animals stayed away from the alien compound. Good; that would make security inside less alert.

The wall was polished concrete. A thick lip jutted out at the top, making climbing it harder.

Sheelah gestured where trees grew near the wall. Stumps nearer

showed that the builders had thought about animals leaping across from branches. But some were tall enough and had branches within a few meters of the top.

Could a chimp make the distance? Not likely, especially when tired. Sheelah pointed to him and back to her, then held hands and made a swinging motion. Could they *swing* across the distance?

He studied her face. The designer would not anticipate two chimps cooperating that way. He squinted up at the top. Too high to climb, even if Sheelah stood on his shoulders.

Yes, he signed.

A few moments later, her hands holding his feet, about to let go of his branch, he had second thoughts.

Ipan didn't mind this bit of calisthenics, and in fact was happy to be back in a tree. But Leon's human judgment still kept shouting that he could not possibly do it. Natural chimp talent conflicted with human caution.

Luckily, he did not have much time to indulge in self-doubt. Sheelah yanked him off the branch. He fell, held only through her hands.

She had wrapped her feet securely around a thick branch, and now began to oscillate him like a weight on a string. She swung him back and forth, increasing the amplitude. Back, forth, up, down, centrifugal pressure in his head. To Ipan it was unremarkable. To Leon it was a wheeling world of heart-stopping whirls.

Small branches brushed him and he worried about noise and then forgot about that because his head was coming up level with the top of the wall.

The concrete lip was rounded off on the inside, so no hook could find a grip.

He swung back down, head plunging toward ground. Then up into the lower branches, twigs slapping his face.

On the next swing he was higher. All along the top of the wall thick glass glistened. Very professional.

He barely had time to realize all this when she let him go.

He arced up, hands stretched out — and barely caught the lip. If it had not protectively protruded out, he would have missed.

He let his body slam against the side. His feet scrabbled for purchase against the sheer face. A few toes got hold. He heaved up, muscled bunching — and over. Never before had he appreciated how much stronger a chimp could be. No man could have made it here.

He scrambled up, cutting his arm and haunch on glass. It was a delicate business, getting to his feet and finding a place to stand.

A surge of triumph. He waved to Sheelah, invisible in the tree.

From here on it was up to him. He realized suddenly that they could have fashioned some sort of rope, tying together vines. Then he could lift her up here. *Good idea, too late.*

No point in delaying. The compound was partly visible through the trees, a few lights burning. Utterly silent. They had waited until the night was about half over; he had nothing but Ipan's gut feelings to tell him when.

He looked down. Just beyond his toes razor wire gleamed, set into the concrete. Carefully he stepped between the shiny lines. There was room among the sharp glass teeth to stand. A tree blocked his vision and he could see little below him in the dim glow from the Station. At least that meant they couldn't see him, either.

Should he jump? Too high. The tree that hid him was close, but he could not see into it.

He stood and thought, but nothing came to him. Meanwhile Sheelah was behind him, alone, and he hated leaving her where dangers waited that he did not even know.

He was thinking like a man and forgetting that he had the capability of a chimp.

Go. He leaped. Twigs snapped and he plunged heavily in shadows. Branches stabbed his face. He saw a dark shape to his right and so curled his legs, rotated, hands out — and snagged a branch. His hands closed easily around it and he realized it was too thin, *too thin* —

It snapped. The *crack* came like a thunderbolt to his ears. He fell, letting go of the branch. His back hit something hard and he rolled, grappling for a hold. His fingers closed around a thick branch and he swung from it. Finally he let out a gasp.

Leaves rustled, branches swayed. Nothing more.

He was halfway up the tree. Aches sprouted in his joints, a galaxy of small pains.

Leon relaxed and let Ipan master the descent. He had made far too much noise falling in the tree but there was no sign of any movement across the broad lawns between him and the big, luminous Station.

He thought of Sheelah and wished there were some way he could let her know he was inside now. Thinking of her, he measured with his eye the distances from nearby trees, memorizing the pattern so that he could find the way back at a dead run if he had to.

Now what? He didn't have a plan. That, and suspicions.

Leon gently urged Ipan — who was nervous and tired, barely controllable — into a triangular pattern of bushes. Ipan's mind was like a stormy sky split by skittering lightning. Not thoughts precisely; more like knots of emotion, forming and flashing around crisp kernels of anxiety. Patiently Leon summoned up soothing images, getting Ipan's breathing slowed, and he almost missed the whispery sound.

Nails scrabbling on a stone walkway. Something running fast.

They came around the triangle peak of bushes. Bunched muscles, sleek skin, stubby legs eating up the remaining distance. They were well trained to seek and kill soundlessly, without warning.

To Ipan the monsters were alien, terrifying. Ipan stepped back in panic before the two onrushing bullets of muscle and bone. Black gums peeled back from white teeth, bared beneath mad eyes.

Then Leon felt something shift in Ipan. Primeval, instinctive responses stopped his retreat, tensed the body. No time to flee, *so fight*.

Ipan set himself, balanced. The two might go for his arms so he drew them back, crouching to bring his face down.

Ipan had dealt with four-legged pack hunters before, somewhere far back in ancestral memory, and knew innately that they lined up on a victim's outstretched limb, would go for the throat. The canines wanted to bowl him over, slash open the jugular, rip and shred in the vital seconds of surprise.

They gathered themselves, bundles of swift sinew, running nearly shoulder to shoulder, big heads up — and leaped.

In air, they were committed, Ipan knew. And open.

Ipan brought both hands up to grasp the canines' forelegs.

He threw himself backward, holding the legs tight, his hands barely beneath the jaws. The wirehounds' own momentum carried them over his head as he rolled backward.

Ipan rolled onto his back, yanking hard. The sudden snap slammed the canines forward. They could not get their heads turned around and down to close on his hand.

The leap, the catch, the quick pivot and swing, the heave — all combined in a centrifugal whirl that slung the wirehounds over Ipan as he himself went down, rolling. He felt the canines' legs snap and let go. They sailed over him with pained yelps.

Ipan rolled over completely, head tucked in, and came off his shoulders with a bound. He heard a solid thud, clacks as jaws snapped shut. A thump as the canines hit the grass, broken legs unable to cushion them.

He scrambled after them, his breath whistling. They were trying to get up, turning on snapped legs to confront their quarry. Still no barks, only faint whimpers of pain, sullen growls. One swore vehemently and quite obscenely. The other chanted, "Baaas'ard ... baaas'ard ..."

Animals turning in their vast, sorrowful night.

He jumped high and came down on both. His feet drove their necks into the ground and he felt bone give way. Before he stepped back to look he knew they were gone.

Ipan's blood surged with joy. Leon had never felt this tingling thrill, not even in the first immersion, when Ipan had killed a Stranger. Victory over these alien things with teeth and claws that come at you out of the night was a profound, inflaming pleasure.

Leon had done nothing. The victory was wholly Ipan's.

For a long moment Leon basked in it in the cool night air, felt the tremors of ecstasy.

Slowly, reason returned. There were other wirehounds. Ipan had caught these just right. Such luck did not strike twice.

The wirehounds were easy to see on the lawn. Would attract attention.

Ipan did not like touching them. Their bowels had emptied and the smell cutting the air. They left a smear on the grass as he dragged them into the bushes.

Time, time. Someone would miss the canines, come to see.

Ipan was still pumped up from his victory. Leon used that to get him trotting across the broad lawn, taking advantage of shadows. Energy popped in Ipan's veins. Leon knew it was a mere momentary glandular joy, overlaying a deep fatigue. When it faded, Ipan would become dazed, hard to govern.

Every time he stopped he looked back and memorized landmarks. He might have to return this way on the run.

IT WAS LATE AND MOST OF THE STATION WAS DARK. IN THE TECHNICAL area, though, a cluster of windows blossomed with what Ipan saw as impossibly rich, strange, superheated light.

He loped over to them and flattened himself against the wall. It helped that Ipan was fascinated by this strange citadel of the god-like humans. Out of his own curiosity he peeked in a window. Under enamel light a big assembly room sprawled, one that Leon recognized. There, centuries ago, he had formed up with the other brightly dressed tourists to go out on a trek.

Leon let the chimp's curiosity propel him around to the side, where he knew a door led into a long corridor. The door opened freely, to Leon's surprise. Ipan strolled down the slick tiles of the hallway, quizzically studying the phosphor paint designs on the ceiling and walls, which emitted a soothing ivory glow.

An office doorway was open. Leon made Ipan squat and bob his head around the edge. Nobody there. It was a sumptuous den with shelves soaring into a vaulted ceiling. Leon remembered sitting there discussing the immersion process. That meant the immersion vessels were just a few doors away down —

The squeak of shoes on tiles made him turn.

ExSpec Ruben was behind him, leveling a weapon. In the cool light the man's face looked odd to Ipan's eyes, mysteriously bony.

Leon felt the rush of reverence in Ipan and let it carry the chimp forward, chipping softly. Ipan felt awe, not fear.

Leon wondered why Ruben said nothing and then realized that of course he could not reply.

Ruben tensed up, waving the snout of his ugly weapon. A metallic click. Ipan brought his hands up in a ritual chimp greeting and Ruben shot him.

The impact spun Ipan around. He went down, sprawling.

Ruben's mouth curled in derision. "Smart Prof., huh? Didn't figure the alarm on the door, huh?"

The pain from Ipan's side was sharp, startling. Leon rode the hurt and gathering anger in Ipan, helping it build. Ipan felt his side and his hand came away sticky, smelling like warm iron in the chimp's nostrils.

Ruben circled around, weapon weaving. "You *killed* me, you weak little dope. Ruined a good experimental animal, too. Now I got to figure what to do with you."

Leon threw his own anger atop Ipan's seethe. He felt the big muscles in the shoulders bunch. The pain in the side jabbed suddenly. Ipan groaned and rolled on the floor, pressing one hand to the wound.

Leon kept the head down so that Ipan could not see the blood that was running down now across the legs. Energy was running out of the chimp body. A seeping weakness came up the legs.

He pricked his ears to the shuffle of Ruben's feet. Another agonized roll, this time bringing the legs up in a curl.

"Guess there's really only one solution —"

Leon heard the metallic click.

Now, yes. He let his anger spill.

Ipan pressed up with his forearms and got his feet under him. No time to get all the way up. Ipan sprang at Ruben, keeping low.

A tinny shot whisked by his head. Then he hit Ruben in the hip and slammed the man against the wall. The man's scent was sour, salty.

Continued on page 93



Astrid the blacksmith believed in magic, but not in miracles,
until Lenore decided to tell her about...

THE SILVER SHOES

BY RESA NELSON

Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young

ONE COOL SPRING MORNING, ASTRID PAUSED at her blacksmith's fire when she heard the bell ring at the door in the next room. Astrid put down the bellows she had been using to encourage the fire and, as a matter of habit, changed the shape of her body from the larger, more masculine shape she used to do her work to her natural female shape.

As her body shifted, Astrid's trousers became more snug against her widening hips, and her vest became loose and roomy. Only then did she walk into the shop adjoining the smithery.

Lenore, the new cobbler, stood in the open doorway. Lenore was tall and shapely, and her corn-silk hair draped

across her shoulders like fine cloth. Lenore was waving to a man across the road and, as she did so, her waist became more narrow and her bosom larger and more shapely.

Astrid caught her breath. Like the other villagers, Astrid would sooner change her clothes in public than her shape. She'd seen Lenore change her shape in public before, but this was the first time Astrid had stood nearby as it happened. Astrid felt shocked and embarrassed. At the same time, she admonished herself not to be unkind. "Lenore," Astrid said. "May I help you with something?"

Lenore turned to face Astrid. As she did, her waist and bosom returned to their normal appearance. Lenore hesitated, holding onto the doorjamb. "I know this may sound odd," she said, smiling. "But I need a pair of shoes."

Astrid laughed, then looked down and saw Lenore was barefoot. Her feet were beautiful. They were brown and high-arched. Her toes were straight and narrow. "I have heard that cobblers' children often go without shoes, but I never knew it was true of the cobbler herself!" Astrid said.

Although Lenore was far from a shy woman, she seemed to withdraw for a moment, looking down at her feet. "I need a blacksmith to make a special pair of shoes for me. I need a pair of silver shoes."

Astrid realized that she had failed to invite Lenore inside. "Come, sit down," Astrid said.

They sat together at a round, wooden table.

"I have never made a pair of shoes before," Astrid said.

"I can help," Lenore said. "I have never worked with metal, as you do. But if we put our skills together, we should be able to figure out how such shoes can be made."

Astrid put her elbows on the table and rested her chin in both hands. She gazed at Lenore for a few moments, trying to puzzle her out. "Perhaps we can."

Lenore looked back steadily at Astrid. "Perhaps it would be helpful if I tell you why I need these shoes."

Astrid shrugged. "If you like."

Lenore looked frightened for a moment, as if she might run away like a deer in the woods. Then her eyes calmed and her face relaxed. "As you know, I have not always lived here. I come from the northlands, where owning a good pair of shoes gives one a decent chance of surviving the winter."

"MY FATHER WAS A COBBLER, AND WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I LEARNED MY trade from him. Soon after, both my mother and father were taken by the plague. Their house was burned down by neighbors fearing the spread of illness. It was summer, and I left the village where I was born with nothing but my clothes, the shoes on my feet, a handful of cobbler's needles, and a small knife.

"I found shelter in a cave in the woods nearby and learned to find food by following the birds and the chipmunks. Being a child and too young to control the shape of my body, I felt my shoes grow tighter every day. I knew I would outgrow them by winter.

"I discovered a town on the other side of my woods. I went there with my cobbler's knife and needles, and knocked on every door. I offered to mend any worn shoes or make shoes for anyone who could provide the leather. In return, I asked for scraps of leather or cloth. I mended a few pairs of shoes, but most people simply gave me whatever scraps they could spare.

"By autumn, I had enough scraps to make a pair of new shoes. I planned them carefully, leaving enough room for my feet to grow comfortably throughout the winter and, at the same time, making the shoes small enough so they would not fall off when I walked in them.

"The miller had given to me an armful of bright red cloth, and I had planned to make a dress with it. But after I stitched my new shoes together, I was disappointed because they looked like patchwork. All the scraps of leather I had used were different shades of black and brown. Although my shoes were well-enough made to see me through the winter, they were ugly. I decided to cover them with the miller's red cloth.

"Once I had covered the shoes in red, I was filled with joy. Not only

were they beautiful, but I had made them myself, and it was the creation as much as the shoes themselves that made me happy.

"That is how I lived year after year. I had a cave for a home. I gathered food from the forest. And every autumn I made a new pair of red shoes for myself. When each winter ended, I celebrated by planting wildflowers by my cave. I discovered I loved working the earth with my hands. I woke up surrounded by the scent of pine trees and the music of the birds. At night I walked barefoot in grassy hollows and gazed upon the stars crowding the sky.

"But every winter was hard, and when I stopped growing and became a woman, I yearned for an easier life."

I CONTINUED TO KNOCK ON ALL THE DOORS IN town with knife and needles in hand. Over the years, I became a fine cobbler, as my father had been. I spoke with everyone who needed shoes made or mended, or who merely wanted someone with whom to pass the time of day. That suited me fine. I stayed in my cave for weeks or even months at a time during the winter, and it was never long before I craved the companionship of other people. I came to be greeted warmly, and my customers bartered generously with me. I believed it would take many years, but I hoped someday I could acquire my own home in the town.

"One morning I knocked upon the door of a fine manor. It was nearly the size of a castle and was surrounded by riding paths and grassy hills. As always, the master himself answered the door when I knocked. He was dressed in a fine, white shirt and black, billowing trousers. He wore high, black riding boots, which were well-heeled. He had first taken pity on me when I was a child. He always gave generously, whether he had any need for his own shoes or not.

"I had been smitten with his good looks and his kindness even when I was just a young girl.

"His hair was as black as his boots. So were his eyes, and they were shining at me as he leaned in his doorway and smiled at me. 'I have a confession to make,' the master of the manor said to me. 'I would like to offer my home to you.'

"I was astonished and spoke without thinking. 'But I have been without a home for many years! Why is it now that you offer me shelter?'

"The master looked down at the toes of his beautiful riding boots for a moment, then looked up and gazed steadily into my eyes. 'If I had offered you shelter before, it would have been as a father. How could I have done so when I was falling in love with you?' He reached out and took my hand. 'I am asking you to be my wife and the lady of this manor.'

"It was a great temptation. A man who had shown me nothing but kindness now offered me companionship, a home beyond my wildest fantasies, and a carefree life.

"Because I was an orphan girl, I had long ago given up hope that any man would ever want to marry me. As I gazed into his dark eyes, I felt the first stirrings of true love.

"I said *yes* without thinking."

"I WAS IMMEDIATELY WELCOMED INTO THE MANOR. A SERVANT GIRL led me to a small room, where she brought in buckets of steaming water and poured them into a grand marble tub. I spent an hour in the bath, until the hot water warmed me to the bone. I was then given undergarments, a long white dress, white stockings, and shiny black shoes.

"The next day the master of the house became my husband.

"At first, I was delighted. I explored every room of the manor. I ate as much as I wanted, whenever I wanted. The servants of the house-

hold were scarcely older than me, and I asked them many questions, for I wished to know them as friends.

"It was then that my husband first admonished me.

"You must not become friendly with the servants," my husband said. "I understand you come from their class, but you are now of a higher class. It is your duty to behave in a way fitting to our class, not theirs."

"This was something I had not considered before agreeing to marry.

"In my own village, there were no people of such high class, and these customs were new to me. 'Tell me what I must do,' I said to my husband. I was determined to live up to whatever responsibilities my new life demanded.

"And so my husband told me that I was to be a lady. I was to make decisions about the household, and if there were any problems I was to defer them to my husband's judgment. I was to sit quietly in the house whenever I was not running it. I was not to go outside. And whenever my husband held dances in the great ballroom, I was to make myself look beautiful and dance with him all evening.

"I embraced this new life. I relished the comfort of our feather bed and the warmth of the manor. One morning I forgot to put on my shoes, and my husband was quick to put his hand upon my arm.

"A lady," he said, "does not go barefoot. Where are your black shoes?"

"I sat on the edge of our feather bed and pulled on my white stockings. When I saw my shiny black shoes at the side of the bed, I felt very sad. I remembered how I had once made my own shoes. 'Husband,' I said. 'May I wear my own red shoes today?'

"He laughed until he saw I was serious. 'Lenore,' he said as he sat beside me on the bed. 'You are no longer a poor commoner. There is nothing you need fear.'

"I just want to wear my own shoes," I said.

"My husband took my hand and held it gently. 'I never imagined you would have any use for them again.'

"Where are they?" I asked. I felt panic rising up within me.

"On the day you moved in," my husband said quietly, "I had them burned."

MY HUSBAND'S PLEASURE WAS to dance, and it soon became my pleasure, as well. I pushed aside my longing to plant wild flowers, which I could not do because a lady does not soil her hands. I ignored my desire to walk barefoot in the grassy meadows at night and look up to the stars, because a lady does not walk outside at night. I tried to forget how much I loved the scent of fresh pine in the morning, and the pleasure of the birds singing.

"Most of all, I pretended not to miss my needles and my small knife and the feel of supple leather in my hands. Cobbling was for commoners, not for ladies.

"I loved dancing because it was what my husband loved.

"He decided to hold a dance in the great ballroom as a way of introducing me to his proper friends. He gave me a pocketful of coins and told me to buy some new dancing shoes from the town cobbler.

"I walked into the cobbler's shop knowing full well my husband expected me to buy a pair of black dancing shoes. But on the cobbler's bench was a pair of red shoes that made my heart pound. They were not the bright, joyful red of my old handmade shoes. They were a dark, mottled red, as if the shoes themselves were brooding.

"I paid the cobbler immediately, and he wrapped up my shoes in a plain package so no one would know what I had bought.

"On the evening of my first dance, I wore a featherweight black dress. The dress covered not only my ankles, but my feet. I walked gingerly into the ballroom, so none of our guests could see my new

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red shoes peeking out from under my skirt. I danced only when the floor was crowded with couples, all dressed in finery of black and white. But in the middle of the evening, my husband made a grand announcement to introduce me to everyone in the ballroom. As the musicians played, my husband spun me onto the empty floor. I felt my skirt flare, and then heard my husband's proper friends laugh softly among themselves.

"They pointed at my shoes as we danced, and someone soon took my husband aside and informed him of my choice in footwear.

"My husband was kind to me. 'I know you miss your shoes,' he said. 'But you have a new life now, which means you have different responsibilities.'

"And is it my responsibility to wear black shoes?" I asked.

"Yes, only black shoes," he said. "Or you may wear white shoes, but only in the summer."

"And so I embraced dancing with all of my heart. My husband, like many wealthy men, was frugal. He could not bear to throw away a perfectly good pair of shoes, even if they were red. He told me I could wear them once in awhile, but only when I was at home alone and the servants could not see me in them. Whenever my husband left the manor, I would steal the red shoes from their hiding place and swear the servants to secrecy. I practiced every step my husband taught me. I asked the servants to dance with me. When they tired, I danced with large scarves or my husband's shirts as partners.

"Some days it seemed my feet kept dancing long after I had tired. My husband would make me sit down, but my feet kept dancing in the air until he pried the shoes from my feet.

"My husband soon hosted another dance in our grand ballroom. He reminded me to do the proper thing and wear my black shoes. He lifted the hem of my long white ballroom dress and nodded in approval when he discovered I was already wearing black dancing shoes. Then he went ahead to the ballroom to greet our guests as I was to finish preparing myself for the dance.

"I searched for my red shoes until I found them locked away in a cabinet. I broke the red shoes free of their prison and put them on.

"Again, I was careful how I danced so no one would notice. It was not until the end of the evening that anyone saw my red shoes and so informed my husband.

"When the dance ended and all our guests had left, my husband tried to speak to me, but I could not stop dancing. He managed to catch me and carry me in his arms out of the ballroom, but still my feet kept dancing in the air. Finally, with the help of two manservants, my husband pried the red shoes from my feet, and they were still at last.

"What troubles you?" my husband asked me later, as we prepared for bed. "You are no longer the happy woman I married."

"I lifted a hand mirror to fix my hair, and saw it was not my own reflection looking back at me, but the reflection of my husband."

A STRID SAT BACK IN HER CHAIR, puzzled. "Someone changed your face?"
Lenore nodded.
"But that is unthinkable," Astrid said. "Do the people of the northlands practice different customs? Do they not consider letting their opinion change another's appearance to be wrong?"

"I did it," Lenore said quietly. "It was not other people who viewed me differently. It was myself. I willingly gave up the life I created for myself in exchange for a bit of comfort.

"And for love. I gave up what I loved because I wanted to be loved.

"When I realized what I had done, I felt trapped. I was truly in love with my husband, and I saw him as my salvation. I came to believe if

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I embraced what he embraced, I would become happy again. Instead, I became my husband."

Astrid chose her words carefully. "And no one remarked upon your face looking just like your husband's face? None of your guests commented upon it? None of the servants? Not even your husband?"

Lenore smiled sadly. "The people of the northlands are very much like the people here. To do so would have been rude. It was out of kindness that no one said anything to me about the change in my appearance. It was something I had to discover for myself."

"What did you do next?"

Although Lenore kept smiling, her eyes dulled. "I could not sleep that night. All I wanted was to dance so I would not have to face the reflection I had seen in the mirror. The next day my husband put on his riding boots and took his favorite stallion out for a ride in the country. I found the red shoes and danced out of the manor and throughout the town. Although I wanted to stop, I could not."

"Were the shoes enchanted?" Astrid said, although she did not believe such a thing was possible.

"No," Lenore said. "Even in the northlands, we do not practice any belief in enchantment. I had simply lost control of myself. I believed I had lost the will to stop, and my thoughts kept spiraling around me until they trapped me in the dance."

"Then how did you stop?" Astrid said.

Lenore looked at her for several long moments. "I came upon the town blacksmith. I asked him to use a sword of his making to cut the shoes from my feet. But I had been dancing for hour upon hour. My feet had bled, and the shoes were stuck to my feet."

"What did you do?"

Lenore paused for a heartbeat, then said, "I asked the blacksmith to cut off my feet."

Astrid looked at Lenore in astonishment. "But he did not."

Lenore held her hands together on the tabletop. "He did."

"How do you explain that?" Astrid said. She peeked under the table to make sure Lenore's bare feet were still there. "Did you grow your-self new feet?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

Astrid studied Lenore's expression. As far as Astrid knew, Lenore had been unlucky in making any true friends in the year since she had joined the village. Astrid had seen Lenore sprout larger breasts or longer legs as she laughingly crossed the road from one man's side to another. Men were mesmerized by both her beauty and her confidence—and women avoided Lenore for those same reasons.

Finally, Astrid said in wonder, "You do not jest."

"No," Lenore said.

"I know you must be telling the truth," Astrid said. "But you must admit it is a very difficult thing to believe."

Lenore nodded. "No one could believe at first I had my feet cut off, especially my husband. But when I explained how it was a sacrifice I would gladly make to return to my old life, my husband gave me his favorite stallion and enough provisions for an entire family. 'Go seek your old life,' my husband said to me. 'And with luck, you will become as strong as the child you once were. Perhaps you will become strong enough to believe your feet are with you in a spirit so great you may walk upon it.'" Lenore paused and covered her face with her hands.

Astrid drew a fresh handkerchief from her vest pocket and gave the handkerchief to Lenore.

"His love for me was true," Lenore said, dabbing the tears from her eyes. "As mine was for him. And I kept his words close to my heart as I rode south, knowing they were the greatest gift he had ever given to me. As I traveled, I imagined my feet as they used to be. As my injury healed, I removed the bandages from my ankles and exposed the stumps instead of hiding them. And as I imagined my feet, I began to have feelings in them. One evening, as I rode to an inn, I looked down to discover my feet had reappeared."

"But they are not real feet," Astrid said. "They are only an illusion, such as when you unknowingly changed your face to that of your husband."

"My feet," Lenore said, "are as real as my belief in them." She pulled up a small bench and placed it lengthwise between them. "Here," Lenore said, resting her legs upon the bench so her feet dangled over the edge. "I will show you how real they are. Take my feet in your hands."

"I might as well measure them," Astrid said. She brushed the dirt gingerly from the bottom of Lenore's bare feet. Astrid aligned the heel of her palm with the heel of Lenore's foot. Lenore's feet were longer and sturdier than Astrid had first thought. She could feel the bones and muscles moving fluidly under her touch.

Eerily, Lenore's skin felt more like tanned leather than skin.

And yet Astrid could not believe the story she had just heard.

"These are real feet," Astrid stated.

Lenore's story had been just that—a story.

JUST AS ASTRID WAS ABOUT TO LET GO, the feet dissolved in her hands, like sugar disappearing into warm water. What had been muscular and bony was now just empty, tingling air. Lenore's legs ended in stumps crisscrossed with thick scars.

Astrid looked up and saw Lenore had closed her eyes. Lenore's hair was now brown instead of golden, and it was streaked with gray. Wrinkles gathered around her eyes and mouth.

Something solid filled up Astrid's hands again, and she looked down to see Lenore's feet. Astrid ran her fingertips along Lenore's ankles, where stumps had been just moments ago. Lenore's skin was seamless and unflawed.

"I apologize for such a vulgar sight," Lenore said. She opened her eyes, now that she had returned to herself.

Astrid felt the warmth from the feet she still held. What had just happened was not possible. "You need not apologize. It takes great trust to show your true self to another."

Astrid frowned as she let go of Lenore's feet, trying to make sense of what had just happened.

Perhaps it had merely been Astrid's imagination. Perhaps she had wanted to believe Lenore's story, and for a moment had seen what Lenore had suggested was true.

Or perhaps this had been Lenore's way of seeking out a friend. Perhaps it was an illusion that Lenore had created and practiced until it worked perfectly.

Lenore looked at Astrid hopefully. "Are you willing to make a pair of silver shoes for me?"

Astrid nodded. "Come back in three days, and we shall devise a way for such shoes to be made."

As Lenore walked outside, she spread her arms in the sunlight as if embracing its warmth. She tossed her golden hair and laughed. She spun in place, dancing a few steps, but only a few. She waved goodbye to Astrid.

As Lenore departed, the feet upon which she walked left no footprints in the dirt path.

Astrid stared at the dirt and Lenore's feet, which did not sink into the loose dirt. Instead, Lenore seemed to be walking on a thin cushion of air, her feet never quite touching the ground.

It was impossible.

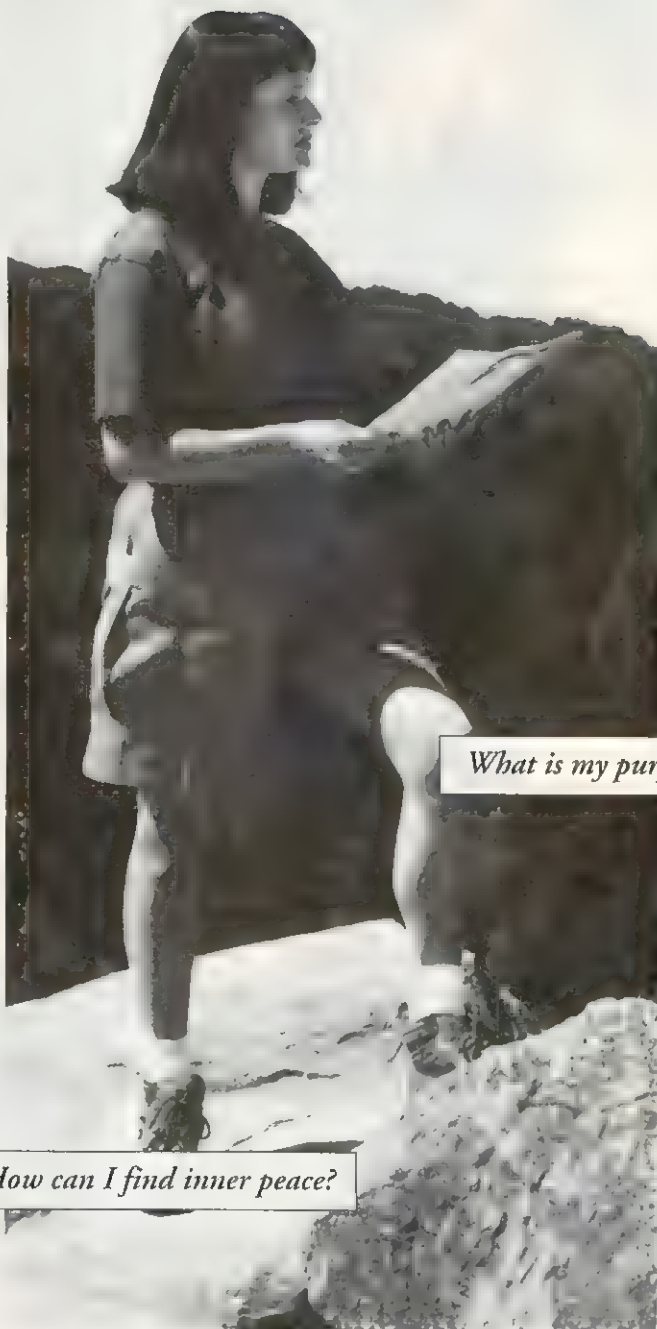
Unless one walked on spirit feet made entirely of belief.

As Lenore encountered a new man on the road, her hair grew more luxurious and her face prettier.

This time, Astrid felt neither shocked nor embarrassed. She smiled fondly at Lenore. "Come back in three days, my friend," she whispered. As Astrid walked back to her work, she glanced down at her own footprints, comforted by the sight.

She would never take them for granted again. □

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All he ever wanted was to become a great comic book artist.
All she ever wanted was to go insane.

BRAIN ARTIST: *A ROMANCE*

BY CHARLES M. SAPLAK
Illustration by Paul Salmon

I

T IS SPRINGTIME.

I am twenty years old.

And now I remember that life without Mil is always followed by life with her, and this cheers me. All of the drawbacks—the brittleness, the apparent lack of dimensionality, the dearth of connotations—these become minor things, so I can laugh to myself as I walk the halls of the Lichtenstein for the first time.

The Lichtenstein Museum of Modern Art is built on a circular plan, with a series of concentric hallways. I've read that the planned architectural effect was to emphasize the cyclical nature, the interconnectedness, the perpetual sense of discovery, of *inevitability* which is modern art.

The actual effect is that a lot of people get lost. I've only been in New York for two weeks, and I still wear the shine of [the small town I'm from, unnameable now]; I'm still on the lookout for the sin and degradation that [my parents, since rendered faceless and without aspect] warned me about. Without noticing I wander out of the exhibit of *Molecular Meaning: Images of Cellular Network Sculptures* and into the wing displaying *New Visions: Fourteen Contemporary Painters*. I don't expect to fall in love here.

I carry a sketchbook and plan to spend a few hours divining golden means and classical proportions from the works on display. It's cheap and I burn with enthusiasm To Become An Artist.

Two dowagers creep behind me to look over my shoulder, and a mature lady watches from off to my left. I'm doing a study after "Memories of Crystalline Warsaw" by Madrecjckya Wawshidska.

"A valiant attempt," one of the dowagers says, in a stage whisper. It is said to her companion but aimed at me, and spiced with just the right amount of condescension. My concentration broken, I look up. Their clothes are crisp, their hair coiffed and sprayed rock-hard, probably by men named "Sir Kristof" or "Monsieur Victor." I smile with the reflexive politeness of one Put In His Place. It wouldn't be more complete if I'd kissed their two hundred dollar Ferragamos, or their badly-in-need-of-ironing faces.

And then the lady to my left speaks. "No. That's a successful effort. He's caught on to everything Wawshidska intended—the delicacy of the city, and the tragedy of it being destroyed in the war. He sees it; you don't."

I look up. She's in her late thirties, or early forties. Nothing about her is exceptionally beautiful.

"I suppose you know so much about *art*," one of the grande dames says. From her mouth the word "art" is like an obscenity. "I suppose you know so much about Wawshidska. I *know* Wawshidska...I've spoken to her. She's a *personal* friend of mine. I know her and her work."

As the dowager says that, the late-thirties lady laughs, and her laughter captures me. I'm intrigued with her. Her laughter is a promise of what a person could be if that person were good enough, graceful enough, glad enough.

"You're lying," she says. "No one has ever met her. I know because I *am* Wawshidska."

The skeletal women are vexed, probably condemning the idea that museums are open to public low-lives such as a struggling sketch artist and a madwoman who would protect him. Having played their tiny—but crucial—role, they trundle away.

"Thank you for taking up for me," I say.

"You enjoy my painting?" Her face is kindness. She doesn't *wear* expressions, she embodies emotions.

I'm not sure how to proceed, but I know I want to continue talking to her.

"You're not really Wawshidska," I say, gently.

"Yes, I am. In fact, this exhibit is the work of fourteen contemporary artists, and I'm six of them."

I feel that familiar wariness for city-dwellers. You see someone who looks and sounds normal, you speak politely with them, and suddenly they do or say something weird. You politely have to try to disengage. But someone that beautiful and gracious *can't* be lying.

I play along. "You've aged well, Mrs. Wawshidska. The title card says you were born in Prague in 1924. Congratulations on being so well-preserved."

"It's all the lacquer. OK, how do I prove this? I've never had to prove it because I've never told anybody before. I *could* show you file cabinets full of royalty statements.... Wait, let me see your sketchbook."

She takes my sketchbook and two 6B Eberhard Faber pencils. She sits on one of the marble benches close to me, her back to the painting, folding one leg beneath her.

"Pick a corner of the painting."

"Lower left."

She nods and puts the pencil to the paper. At no time does she look at the painting. Her face shows no tension. After exactly one minute she picks up the pencil which she'd been using to make flat, broad

strokes. Its point is needle sharp. She holds it lightly, perfectly perpendicular, and swirls it around the page. After about thirty seconds of that she looks up and hands the sketchbook back to me.

I give it a quick look, then carry the sketch over so I can hold it up beside the painting. Not only has she reproduced the composition perfectly, but her last half-minute of pencil strokes show something I hadn't noticed in the original painting, but which becomes obvious as I look at the sketch. The texture and direction of the brushstrokes form a second composition which perfectly complements the obvious picture. Royal Castle Square in the old section of Warsaw is perfectly preserved in the painting, but *within* is a subliminal composition which shows the fairy-tale castle reduced to bloody, dusty rubble.

In different [stories and movies I had seen], people are overwhelmed by beauty. Most regard that as corny, laughable. I'm not some flighty romantic; I grew up in [rough? industrial? town; its name and character dissolved]. Now I look at "Memories of Crystalline Warsaw" and tears come to my eyes.

"I think I believe you," I say. I try to be nonchalant and sophisticated, but I'm certain that she senses my desperation.

"Walk with me for a while?" she says.

HER NAME IS MILDRED WOODROFFE. SHE EXPLAINS A FEW THINGS TO me as we walk. She has never cared for recognition. She was so prolific and versatile that if she released all her work under her own name, the self-appointed Arbiters of Taste would label her a hack, and her work would lose value.

Thus she had become:

Wawshidska, who recaptures the prewar Eastern Europe of her youth. Garcia y Rivera, who populates street scenes of barrios with dark-skinned Elvises and Richard Nixons and Groucho Marxes. Donald R. Bernstein, whose intricate gouache boards of integrated circuits mutate in mid-illustration into Aztec totems and hieroglyphics. Judy Elutron, who portrays women without facial features as an expression of her feminism. Robert Rehl, whose futuristic cities adorned the covers of so many Ace science fiction novels in the late '70s. And dozens of others, going back years. Any style, any subject matter, any persona. Whatever she wants to do she does.

IN HER APARTMENT, A TWELVE-HUNDRED SQUARE FOOT STUDIO OVER-looking Grand Central Terminal, she looks at my sketchbook, politely.

And I look at some of the hundred or so paintings which stand and lie on the floor, hang on the walls, sit stacked in the corners. And at some of the hardbound retrospectives published by Appleton-Century and E.P. Dutton. And at some of the gallery posters for shows featuring her art, under dozens of different names.

In the southeast corner of her apartment, a mobile easel on casters holds a stretched canvas. Beside it a low table holds an array of oil paints in tubes, an assortment of bristle brushes, and small jars containing turpentine, white spirit, vinegar, and varnishes. The canvas is blank. Dust sits on everything.

"So tell me about your work," she says.

"Not much to tell. I'm self-taught. I'm taking a year off from college, trying to get on with Angstrom Comics, but it's a hard business to break into. I'm working part-time at a Copies Galore on Second Avenue. Tell me about your work. You're fabulous."

She shrugs. "I'm self-taught, too. Before I could walk I picked up some crayons and drew a picture of my parents. Well, here...."

She picks up one of the coffee-table books and flips it open to a full page spread. There is a picture reproduced there which looks like an oil painting. The caption is simple: (untitled)/ 1953/ M. Woodroffe.

The picture shows a middle-American couple, very much in love. It doesn't look like Crayola crayon, and it doesn't bear any resemblance to the blobby, stick-figure drawings normal children do. In the warmth of the colors, in the stability of the composition, one can see a young child's love for her parents.

I know I'll never execute anything so accomplished.

Untitled—for Mildred wasn't old enough to talk.

I know that such things aren't impossible. I'd seen a reproduction

of "Girl With Bare Feet," executed by a fourteen-year-old Pablo Picasso. And how old was Mozart when he composed his first symphony?

But Mildred isn't interested in her own work, and presses me to talk about mine.

I show her the photocopied spec-sheet from Angstrom Comics. "See, this is the sort of thing they use for an audition. Two cover-style drawings, some pages of panels featuring their characters—I'm doing Donnie LeDare, Cybernetic Prophet, and Star Wanderer. And finally, breakdowns based on a rough script they give you. I've got to adapt this script for Star Wanderer. He finds an artifact on a planetoid and opens it up and sees something weird—they didn't say what, leaving that up to me. I've got to come up with a big ending and illustrate it. I'm thinking about having him captured by an evil alien with clawlike hands and saucer eyes who tries to experiment on him."

As I speak I try to memorize her every aspect. She's a little taller than I. Her hips are narrow, her bosom full.

She's pale-skinned, with jet-black hair (a graphic effect), and I notice for the first time in the soft light of her apartment that it's shot through with a few strands of gray. Her eyes are green.

Desire.

Desire is the only thing that can distract me from the obvious question—what can she see in me?

NIGHT FALLS ON THE CITY, AND WE SLEEP together, of course. The [other girls] in my young life were only a warm-up, a tuning of the instruments. Just how does a person feel when he discovers that he's been incomplete, that he's rediscovered a part of himself and rejoined it?

IT IS MORNING.

She wakes me with freshly brewed coffee.

We share small talk. I glow inside. My life has changed.

Reluctantly, I tell her I've got to go to Copies Galore, and she offers to walk with me.

While she's off to get dressed, I notice something odd in her kitchen wastebasket. I pull out a long strip of paper. On either side of it are drawings of a familiar figure—Star Wanderer—exploring a great castle on a barren planetoid. The drawings are executed in what looks like ballpoint pen, in a loose, scratchy style. The figure of Star Wanderer is dynamic and alive. At the "end" of the series of drawings, Star Wanderer gains access to the interior of the castle and sees?

Himself, approaching the planetoid.

A time warp.

And the strip of paper is twisted and stapled together at the "ends," so that it forms a continuous story, its end and its beginning indistinguishable.

Time warp = Moebius strip.

She must have dashed it off while waiting for the coffee to brew. Had I ever conceived and executed such a thing, I'd have been bursting to show it to someone. And this sort of thing she throws away.

USUALLY, EVERY HOUR AT THE COPIES GALORE IS—PARDON BARELY tolerable cuteness—a copy of every other hour. Rude customers, apathetic boss, stubborn machines. But today is different. I'm thinking about Mil.

This afternoon we go to the Hispanic Society Museum on West 155th Street. Mil slips her hand into mine as we walk. When you know someone, when you're with someone you love, the world is transformed.

IN THE MUSEUM, MIL STANDS AND STARES AT "TOLEDO MUSICIAN" BY EL Greco. The painting shows a slumping guitarist. He's grotesquely elongated. He's like a marionette without strings.

She stares at his stretched arms, his clawlike hands, his stick-like legs.

I start to pull away but she stays there. She seems to have forgotten that I'm with her.

I shift from foot to foot as she stares. "Interesting style," I say, wanting us to move on.

She stares. I don't even see her blink. Is she memorizing it? She can do that, probably.

Finally, she breaks away from the painting. As we walk away she says, glowing, "Did you know that El Greco is speculated to have had some astigmatism, some disease of the optic nerves, which caused him to perceive things that way?"

IT'S LATER THE SAME WEEK. I'M IN THE EDITORIAL OFFICES OF Angstrom Comics, publishers of *Star Wanderer*, *Corpse Tales*, *Bip the Bunny*, *Donnie LeDare*, and numerous other Fine Titles. I'm sitting across a cluttered desk from Mort Schlager, who reminds me of

I'm thinking about having him captured by an evil alien with clawlike hands and saucer eyes who tries to experiment on him.

[some high school teacher I'd had]. There's a thirty-year-old framed photo on the wall of him with Jack Kirby. He alternates huge bites from a pepper-and-onion-laden, cold cuts hero with slivers from antacid tablets which he chips off with an X-acto knife.

He chews as he looks at my portfolio. I watch his face, but I can't interpret his expressions.

After a minute or so he passes the sheaf of Bristol Board across the desk to me.

"Stiff," he says, then takes a bite of his sandwich.

I put my drawings back in my leather case. "Well, thanks anyway. Thanks for your time."

"It's a tough business, kid. A grind. Look..." he says, fumbling and digging around for a sticky-back note. "Put your name and number on this. Sometimes we get in a deadline bind and we need back-grounds or paste-up on a piecework basis."

"Thanks," I say, watching him place the sticky-back into a stack with dozens of others.

"Oh, yeah, and look up some Miller and Wrightson and Ditko and practice copying them. That might help you."

IT'S RAINING. MIL AND I SIT IN HER STUDIO. (WE ARE, FOR ALL PRACTICAL purposes, living together.) The TV is on and the sound is turned off. She's made some herbal tea, which tastes like [a flavor I had liked when young]. She isn't working on anything. (I never see her working on anything.) I have a sheet of kid-finish Bristol on a lap board, and I'm trying to do a page with Sharpie marker, aiming for a flowing composition like those of Alex Toth.

But of course I'm not Alex Toth. The result looks random, unstructured....

I look up and see Mil watching me. Her eyes are bright, and she has an enigmatic little smile. I put down my lap board and walk over to sit beside her on the couch. We kiss, and she touches me with such

tenderness, such passion, such hunger. It never occurs to me to ask myself what she sees in me.

THE DAYS ARE GETTING HOT. MIL'S EXCITED. SHE'S TAKING ME "SOMEPLACE SPECIAL." She wants to show me a surprise. She's not kidding.

The cab driver, when he lets Mil and me out at Saint Paul's Church in Harlem, looks at us through thick glasses and says, "You sure you wanna go to this neighborhood?"

Saint Paul's is open. Inside a few people are kneeling in the pews. Some candles are burning before a plaster statue of Mary. Mil leads me around the perimeter of the nave. She stops before a painted panel of the wall. The picture shows Jesus with Pontius Pilate.

"Fresco Buono," Mil says. "Painted directly onto wet plaster."

The picture confuses me. The colors are garish and discordant. The anatomy is distorted without the consistency of style. The composition is woefully unbalanced toward the thorn-crowned Jesus. It breaks every rule, and I can see a hundred flaws. Still, I can't take my

neck and shoulders. At first I think Mil is asleep, but then I notice her reaching out to slowly, softly touch the printed pages in front of her.

I walk over to rub her back. She seems to barely notice me. In her muscle tone I feel something unusual—not tension, but intensity.

I lean forward to whisper in her ear. "What's so interesting?" I see that with the ring finger of her left hand she's alternately tracing the lines of two portraits. One, called "The Bacchant," shows a vital, strong man, naturalistically portrayed. The other, an untitled sketch, shows a bulb-headed, possibly moronic man with haunting moist eyes. And then I notice....

"Were these two models related?"

Mil shakes her head. "Not related—they're the same man. Lovis Corinth, German, early twentieth century. And they're not that far apart in age either."

"One artist hated him and one admired him, right?"

Mil leans back so that her left cheek rests against my right. "Same artist. *These are self-portraits.* It's not that he looked different, he just *saw* differently. Before and after December 1911. Right hemisphere stroke, with extensive brain damage."

The inspiration, the fire that touched this deaf mute? This is where it happens! This is where passion transcends ability.

IT'S GETTING DARK A LITTLE EARLIER NOW, BUT the heat of summer is still with us. I'm in Mil's apartment. *De facto*, it has sort of become my studio. Mil never paints. I'm doing some of my own work. I'm the regular backgrounder for *Girl Talk*, a romance comic—a "Penny Pink"—which, artistically, is at the bottom of the line for Angstrom.

Mil is watching another videotape from the documentary section at New York Public Library. She watches tapes and churns through books voraciously. When she develops an interest, she obsesses. We don't make love as often, or as fervently as we used to.

We're comfortable.

I finish a page and walk to the window to rest my eyes by focusing on distant objects. Every page is worth \$7.50. I hope that Mort or someone upstairs notices that I'm doing my best, although the titles I'm working on don't even come close to deserving it.

I turn to watch Mil. She has a remote control for her VCR and she watches certain segments from her documentary over and over. On the screen is what looks like an animation, but it turns out to be a computer-generated image—a tomograph—of a living brain.

"I hate romance comics," I say to Mil. "Same damned story over and over again. Girl meets boy, girl loses boy, girl gets boy."

She touches my hand and smiles, but doesn't take her eyes away from the image on the screen. "Literature is repetition. Remember Joseph Campbell. The same old stories over and over."

The brain on the screen flashes as if possessed by a thunderstorm. The image cuts to a retarded boy, undergoing a seizure.

The pictures are almost hypnotic as they rhythmically alternate between arcanelly captioned abstractions and pitiable tableaux.

A bluish-gray magnetic resonance image of a human head...

...a man struggling to arrange blocks on a table.

A multi-hued positron emission tomograph, wildly flickering...

...a woman staring at her own hand, tearfully saying, "I don't know what that is."

A single-photon emission computerized tomograph—a "spect"—boiling like lava breaking the surface of a cold sea...

...an ashen-faced girl calmly mouthing nonsensical syllables intoned and rhythmized exactly like human speech.

The tape progresses to an interview. A skeletal man in lab coat and thick glasses—the caption on the screen labels him as a psychiatrist—waves his clawlike fingers forward and back in the air as he says, "Brain lesions; electrical stimulations during surgery; autopsies of behaviorally documented psychotics—all these offer clues to the structure of the mind, just as disassembly of a mechanism offers

eyes from it.

"There's a legend they tell about these frescoes," Mil tells me. "They were finishing construction on this church back during the depression. A deaf-mute hobo came begging at the rectory. They gave him soup and water and allowed him to sleep under the roof of the roughed-in church. The plasterers left for the night, and when they returned the next morning, the hobo had worked all night and had painted 'Station One—Jesus is Condemned.'"

"According to the legend, he did a different Station every night for the next two weeks, with no one ever seeing him work. The parish hadn't planned on a motif of the Stations—but no one could bear to have them covered up."

As we walk around the nave, slowly, quietly, I look at each picture in its turn, at the coal-black Cyrene and at Veronica's Veil. They're all technically inept, but I can't tear my eyes away.

Mil squeezes my hand and whispers to me, "Do you see it? Can you feel it? The inspiration, the fire that touched this deaf mute? This is where it happens! This is where passion *transcends* ability."

My hand in hers tingles like an electric wire. I feel as if I'm breaking the surface of deep, thick water, and I realize that we've circled the church and I'm once again standing before the picture of "Jesus Condemned."

SUMMER IS HERE. I'VE TAKEN THE STRETCHED CANVAS OFF MIL'S EASEL and I'm working on backgrounds there. I've managed to squeeze a meager assignment from Mort Schlager. I dip my sable brush in the India ink and fill in the breccia cliffs behind Moon Guardian as he fights the Cybernetic Sentinels. "Don't be creative," Mort had warned.

Mil sits on her couch with two library books lying open before her.

After two hours I've earned five dollars by backgrounding a complete page behind the figures and machinery a good artist had previously done. I lean back and rub my eyes and try to knead my own

insight into that mechanism's function and structure."

The picture switches to an elderly man in Roman collar. The caption identifies him as Father Martin Oukon, S.J., Philosopher. His left eye is clouded over with blindness, and he is motionless as he speaks. "The ant, scrambling over fragments of individual bricks fallen from a castle wall, has no conception of castle, no conception of king, no conception of kingdom, no conception of castle architect."

A WARM SEPTEMBER.

They're giving me another chance at Angstrom. I had dropped off some backgrounded pages for *Teen Tales* and ran into Mort Schlager in the secretary's office. "Here," he said, as if he were just waiting for someone to whom he could give an assignment. "You draw, don't you? Here's a five-page script for a backup for *Supernatural Space Stories*. Get it to me Monday before 10 a.m. and we'll run it."

Now, once again, I'm attached to my drawing board. I'm trying to illustrate "Castle of the Crystal Skulls." A space explorer encounters a metallic structure on an uncharted planetoid. Arranged around the planetoid are seven crystalline machines which periodically flicker with eerie, nascent light. Eventually the machines, which hold the combined mentalities of the dead inhabitants of the planet, make telepathic contact with the explorer.

I can't pull myself away from this assignment. My back aches and my right wrist is sore. My eyes burn.

When I sleep Friday night, I dream of crystal skulls which speak to me in unknown languages.

Saturday I fight my way through page three, inking it from the upper left corner to the lower right, while I rest by doing breakdowns and penciling panels for page four.

Saturday night Mil looks over the pages I've done. She smiles at me—her enigmatic, warm, and open smile. She touches my neck and brushes her lips against mine and convinces me to put the pens and brushes down, cap the ink, and come to bed with her.

"I'll make it worth your while," she says.

IT IS SUNDAY MORNING.

I look at the pages I've done and the thumbnail sketches I'd made for the fifth page. It's as if a switch has been thrown. I look over my work in the harsh eastern sunlight, and realize that it's no good.

Dead on the page.

I sit for a while and look out the window, watching sunlight define the city.

Mil joins me. "I'll think I'll go over to the Brooklyn Library today, to get out of your hair. Do you want to come meet me in Prospect Park?"

"I don't know. I don't think it's going to take that long. Page five is going to go pretty easily, I think."

I feel, sitting here speaking to Mil, deliciously happy.

"Then again, I may not even finish page five. I don't think I'm cut out for comic work. In fact, I'm probably not cut out for art at all."

Mil searches my face. If she's looking for bitterness, she's disappointed, because I feel none.

"Well, finish it anyway. If you don't even try, you'll regret it later."

I shrug.

"Promise me you'll finish it. Promise me you won't give up. Promise me you'll keep trying."

I smile and give her a kiss. "How can I refuse? I promise."

IT IS SUNDAY EVENING. MIL IS OFF ON HER SELF-IMPOSED EXILE OF research. I've just put the last touch on page five of the story. The work is stunningly mediocre; I'm as comfortable with it as if it were an old friend. I'm tired. I scare up some supper, leave some for Mil, then wrap the just-dried pages up to drop off at Angstrom on my way to Copies Galore. I'm not sure if they'll even run the story. I don't care.

I go to sleep soon after the sun sets. I don't hear Mil moving around the studio.

I don't know if I dream; I don't remember.

ON THIS DAY EVERYTHING FALLS APART.

I get a call at Copies Galore. I'm taken away from one of our huge high-speed, high-volume machines where I'm watching thousands of identical representations of an electronic schematic tumble into a plastic bin.

"I like it, kid," Mort Schlager tells me over the phone. "Quite a bit. Come down during your lunch break. Let's talk. Maybe there's some opportunities for you here."

MORT IS DRINKING BLACK COFFEE WHEN I ARRIVE. HE SMILES AT ME. HE doesn't waste time and starts talking before I even sit down.

"How would you like a regular backup in *Supernatural Space*? Or *Cybernetic Prophet*? Thirty dollars a page. Or backups in both if you like. And once in a while you fill in on one of our lead titles. Do good and move up. We can throw a lot of assignments your way."

I don't feel my body as I sit down. My heart's throbbing. "Do you have the right guy? I just drew 'Castle of the Crystal Skulls'—turned it in this morning."

Mort picks up a page of Bristol Board. "Got it right here. Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. I felt like this when I first saw Eisner's *Spirit*, and Krigstein's 'Master Race.' I haven't seen anything this nice in years. I could kick myself for wasting you on those Penny Pinks all this time."

His face is respectful. He gently hands the page to me.

And it's not mine.

My name is signed to it, but it's not one of the pages I drew. It's a gorgeous page of machines that think, a castle that dominates a barren landscape like the self-structuring intelligent life in a cold universe, and an explorer who struggles to know, to do, to *understand*.

I didn't draw it, but I know who did.

I CONFRONT MIL. MY MIND IS JUMBLED. I CAN'T STOP TO CONSIDER WHY I'm so mad. This doesn't prevent me from speaking.

"...and what would happen when they gave me more assignments? Should I just bring everything back to you and beg you to become me for a while? Should I become just another pseudonym for you?"

Tearfully, her face contorting: "I thought I was helping!"

"Mildred the great! The gift of God! Ready to offer mere mortals her grace, if she screws them and finds them worthy."

"But I *love* you!"

"No, Mil, I think you're *amused* by me."

"You have to keep trying," she pleads.

"Why don't you find somebody your own talent level—or better still, someone your own *age*."

This moment my life changes again. I don't take a single thing with me when I leave her apartment.

IT IS NOW CLOSE TO ONE MONTH LATER. I'M WALKING IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD. On impulse, I enter the lobby, ask the security guard to buzz her apartment. I don't want anything from her. I'd simply like to apologize.

He consults a list and informs me that she has moved.

ANOTHER MONTH HAS PASSED. I'M EATING A STALE SIX-DOLLAR SANDWICH in the cafeteria of the Metropolitan. I happen to look out toward the sculpture garden and, standing before Moore's "Family Group," I see her.

Or do I?

It looks like Mildred, but there are subtle differences. The posture. Her carriage seems stiffer than I remember. She seems to move like a much older woman—my Mil was always lithe and supple.

She turns to look at Rodin's "Balzac" and I see her face. Now I'm sure that it is Mil. I wave and try to catch her eye. She looks at me. There's no recognition on her face whatsoever. She doesn't seem to be studying the sculpture like Mil would; her expression is bland, almost puzzled.

It's disquieting. Is it her, or not? She walks away, and I make no further effort to contact her.

IT'S AUTUMN. I'M WANDERING THE HALLWAYS OF THE LICHTENSTEIN. I'M

not carrying a sketchbook. I'm trying to take my mind off being offered full-time, graveyard shift supervisor at Copies Galore.

A long circular hallway is labeled with a floor sign: *L'Art Brut: Folk Art Creations of the Mentally Impaired*.

I wander among the fang-mouthed family portraits done by anonymous abused children; hellish canvases demon-populated by paranoid schizophrenics; great stretches of paper divided and subdivided and subdivided into infinities of smallness by obsessive compulsives; the blurred and floating landscapes of sensory deprivates. And then I round a turn and see it:

One painting, oil on canvas, stands out from the rest of the exhibit like a cool, forested island amidst a boiling sea. The picture is not technically perfect, but it reflects a marvelous sense of time and place and individuality. Its colors are placid, its perspective stable. It shows a man sitting on a couch with a lap board. He's bent over the board working on a drawing. His manner is intense, yet graceful—in every sense of the word—and loving.

Behind him, through the studio windows, is the New York skyline; orderly geometric shapes beneath a warm sky.

The picture is titled "Struggling Artist."

The wall card identifies the artist not by name but by diagnosis: *The woman who executed this painting suffers from a degenerative condition of the central nervous system.*

The man in the picture is me.

THE FIRST STORM OF WINTER IS WAITING IN THE SKY. ISOLATED WET flakes hit the windshield of the rental car as I make my way up to Saint Catherine's, a private sanitarium set back from Route 28, north of Cooperstown but south of Mohawk. I'm on the final leg of a chase which has sent me from museum and gallery coordinators to art agents to psychiatrists to the New York State Licensing Board to the AMA Registry.

Saint Catherine's is a rambling stone institution which probably dates from the '40s. A concrete and glass appendage has been grafted on the side. They specialize in chronic cases.

It's clean inside. A woman—maybe a nurse—in institutional blue slacks and blouse with white sweater sits at a monitor as she scrolls through a roster.

"No, sir, we don't have a Mildred Woodroffe here," she tells me.

"A patient in her forties. She's had a disease which has incapacitated her, and it probably came on suddenly."

"Sir, there's no patient here named Woodroffe."

"She paints. She's done paintings which have been exhibited outside of the hospital."

"Sir, I don't have records here of the treatments or diagnoses of the patients. I simply have their names and room numbers. Even if I did have their medical records, those are private, and I wouldn't be able to share those with anyone but immediate family members."

"Isn't there someone I could speak with? Isn't there someone here who might recognize the person that I'm talking about?"

"Well, I'm sorry. If you leave a message...."

She takes my name and number and walks away from the monitor, probably taking my note to the message boxes, or to a trash can somewhere out of my sight.

Instead of leaving through the glass doors, I quietly make my way past the reception area. The glassy room stuck onto the ground floor of the building is a lounge with large potted plants and doors which open onto a wheelchair-accessible garden.

Sitting in the lounge is a young woman in maroon slacks and matching sweater. She sits beside a man strapped into a wheelchair. She nods at me and then turns back to the man. His right hand is constantly twitching. She's holding his left, which is still, tracing letters on the back of it with her index finger. If he's aware of her at all, his face doesn't show it.

Through the glass doors I see the snow starting. The world is, at this moment, almost achingly quiet. And when I turn to leave I see, hanging above the doors which lead back into the main building, a painting.

Three feet by two feet, layers of semi-transparent acrylic glaze.

Severely abstracted forms and proportions, rendering the scene unrecognizable to most. Cool blue colors of sadness and outer space. A castle of lattice-work crystal. Seven solitary machines arrayed like sentinels around the castle. And moving through the scene, oblivious, untouched, an explorer.

And the explorer is me.

A card on the wall says:

Untitled—Marilyn Winters. *This painting was completed by a Saint Catherine's patient as part of physical and emotional therapy. Painting, drawing, and craftwork have been found to have a soothing yet healthy effect.*

"Fascinating, isn't it?" the young lady asks me.

"Yes. Have you ever seen their art therapy? Can you tell me anything about it?"

She glances back at the man in the wheelchair. "Raymond doesn't participate in programs exactly like those. Most of the people who can do work like that are in a ward on the third floor."

I don't take the time to thank her, but go looking for the stairs.

On the third floor I creep along the wall, out of sight of the nurses' station. I push open a door and look in. A man in a wheelchair stares at a television on which a panel discusses politics. A slight grin comes and goes across his face as he listens.

I try another door. A woman sits up in a mechanical bed, adjusted to let her look toward the window. I debate with myself, decide, and ask her, "Do you know a Marilyn, or a Mildred? She should be in this ward. She likes to paint."

The woman rolls her head to look toward the door. Her lips twitch, and I see that she's going to say something, but that she's having trouble doing it.

I inch forward, then lean close to her face.

"These aren't my arms," she says. "This isn't my body."

Someone is moving in the third room I try. A woman with a child-like face sits on the edge of her bed. She has a jumble of crayons sitting on the bedsheets beside her. A 15-by-20-inch heavy stock sketchbook is open on her lap.

I don't recognize her.

She's stooped forward with concentration.

I don't recognize her!

She's drawing, with the blobby, sticklike style of normal children, a picture of two people. Her parents? Or her and me?

The woman is Mildred. She hears me approaching and lifts her face, awkwardly. She tilts her head and obviously can't recognize, or label, or remember me.

I touch her face, put my arms around her, try to look into her eyes. Life is a cycle of recognition and eclipse of recognition; gain and loss; conjunction and disjunction.

I hold her tightly, as if afraid that we're ready to dissolve.

Shadows appear at the edge of my vision.

"That's him, Doctor," the receptionist says, pointing me out.

A man in a blue lab coat comes forward. He wears a bland shirt and dark blue tie. His hands are long and slender; he looks at me through thick lenses.

"Should I call Security, Doctor?" the receptionist says.

The doctor looks at me for a long moment as if he's sizing me up; as if he's deciding something.

"No," he finally says, waving the receptionist away. She casts me a final wary stare before she leaves.

"Did you know her?" the doctor asks as he reaches out to touch me on the shoulder.

"I do know her. Her name is Mildred Woodroffe. I do know her."

"We were told that she had no family. We were told that she was unattached."

His words tear me. "What happened to her? When did she get sick?"

"My name is Doctor Fletcher. So you and she were close?" he asks.

Mil doesn't pay attention to us as we speak. If she hears our words, she doesn't give any sign. As I let her go, she slumps back, and her hands find the crayons and sketchbook.

"She didn't 'get sick,'" Doctor Fletcher says. "She damaged herself with chronic drug use."

"That's not true," I say. "I never even knew her to drink. She said that things like that dulled her senses."

"The tests don't lie, although we did have trouble pinpointing it at first. Have you ever heard of strazorlorin-D? Or the brand names *Strazac*, or *Strazonol*?"

"Never. I don't think I ever saw Mil take an aspirin. How could she get drugs like that?"

Fletcher shrugged. "She lived in the city; she had money. Strazorlorin family drugs aren't illegal; they're just not prescribed for human use any more. About four years ago they were experimentally used on some severe forms of epilepsy.... Short term, they were effective at repressing seizures, but before long some unfortunate side effects came to light, things which couldn't be predicted—subtle things which didn't show up during animal experiments."

He gently takes one of the crayons from Mil's hand and sets it on the bed beside her. Her hand wanders around until it feels the crayon. Her fingers close around it, and she moves it back to where she can slowly move it around the surface of the heavy paper.

"Reflex," he says. "I don't think she truly knows what she's doing."

"One way of looking at intelligence is to say that a child's brain is a jumble of individual neurons. As the child grows, the brain arranges itself into a network. A genius would have a very efficient, wide-ranging network which can work through problems without any extraneous neuron activity; a substandard person would have a brain with a less extensive network. There haven't been any structural changes to the cells themselves, but the chemical messengers between the cells are being disabled. The residual strazorlorin is systematically deconstructing the connective network of her brain."

"Well she ever be better?"

Doctor Fletcher shakes his head. "I don't think it's reversible. She used the drug over a long period of time—months perhaps—and, like arsenic, it stays in the system for a long time after use. What I don't understand is why in the world she would have been taking that drug. And didn't she see what it was doing to her? Strazorlorin has a subtle, but immediate effect. By the time she was sent here, she was still able to paint, although she didn't have enough presence or lucidity to tell us anything. And she's steadily gotten worse. Second by second, the strazorlorin is slowly robbing every neuron of its capacity to network with those around it."

IT IS THE HEART OF A BITTER WINTER.

Snow lies on the fields surrounding Saint Catherine's; frost decorates the windows in crystalline patterns. Moonlight reveals a quiet world outside.

I have come to see Mil these past few months, whenever I can manage to leave the city. At no time has she given any sign that she recognizes me. Now I sit in a chair watching her sleep.

Hidden in my jacket is my hope. Something I brought with me on this final trip.

Doctor Fletcher has been glad to allow me to sit with Mil, to hold her limp hands (no longer able to grasp a crayon), to speak to her. He probably feels that even if such rituals can't do her any good, they might be a necessary part of the "disengagement process" for me.

No one suspects what I plan.

Her death is nearly unnoticeable. She lies there and steadily wheezes. (As they told me of their decision to not attach her to a respirator, they looked relieved when I didn't object.)

And then one moment she stops.

I get up to arrange her hands, to turn her head so that it rests level and straight on the pillow. I kiss her on the left cheekbone, but I do it swiftly.

I don't have much time.

I take the small case from inside my jacket.

The drugs in the strazorlorin family, I have found, have all exhibited strange side effects. The D-variant represses seizures but robs brains of abstract reasoning. The S-variant is psychoactive but embarks users on trips from which they can't return. The F-variant enlivens dreams, enabling people to have colorful and detailed lucid adventures, but in their waking lives they have the unsettling experiences of seeing figures from their dreams.

But I have no interest in these variations of the drug.

I open the case and remove a syringe and a one-half fluid ounce of a three-percent solution of strazorlorin-M.

There has been one documented case of the human use of strazorlorin-M. A sixty-seven-year-old Alzheimer's patient was injected with a three percent solution of strazorlorin-M, in hopes that his memory loss could be halted or even reversed. He immediately went into a catatonic state. Before his seizure he had been rambling about being driven by his daughter to the clinic that morning. It had been raining.

Strazorlorin-M had reordered his existence, confining his entire mind to the reliving of the immediate experience...

He lived in that catatonic state for two more years. No one was ever able to make contact with him, but study of his eye-movements and documentation of his half-mumbled words during the remaining two years of his life suggest that he was continuously reliving that rainy morning.

An autopsy revealed that the chemical balance of his amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, and certain regions of his frontal lobes were severely altered.

Strazorlorin-M had reordered his existence, confining his entire mind to the reliving of the immediate experience he had been thinking about when the drug took effect.

A SIMPLE QUESTION: IF I COULD SOMEHOW CHANGE MY LIFE SO THAT I would never lose my beloved Mil, but would always have her with me, would I choose to do so?

I answer.

The needle is sharp against my neck.

But this strange dream, this dream of asking for and receiving a circular, cyclical life, of lying in a bed watching the line between sunlight and shadow eternally creep across the walls of my room, as always, passes.

There are drawbacks to such an existence—brittleness, apparent lack of dimensionality, a dearth of connotations, the fact that an eternal present slowly loses its quality of reality when stripped down so drastically, when removed from the stream of time.

The things I've lost—[the faces of my parents], [my childhood], [the experiences of growing up], [a future], [my name]—these are the costs. And then I remember that life *without* Mil is always followed by life *with* her, and this cheers me. I can laugh to myself as I walk the halls of the Lichtenstein, for the first time.

I am twenty.

It is springtime. □

The cosmic surrealism of Richard Powers

POWERS OF IMAGINATION

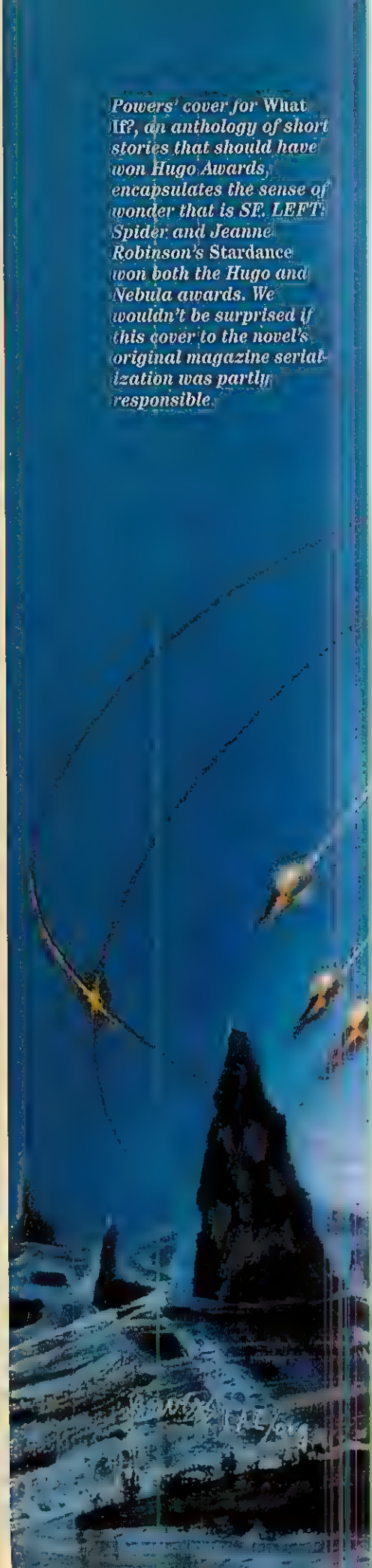
BY DAVID G. HARTWELL

RICHARD POWERS IS THE MOST original and inventive artist to work in the science fiction field, ever. Aside from the fact that he did more paperback covers than any other illustrator in the 1950s and 1960s, dominating the entire look of paperback SF for two decades, what he did was to introduce the visual language of surrealism into SF illustration and expand its possibilities permanently. His technical range and skill is awe-inspiring and his visionary, suggestive images have continued to evolve, even into his fifth decade as a professional in the field.

Shortly after the beginning of the paperback revolution, in the early 1950s, Ian Ballantine started Ballantine Books and chose



Powers' cover for What If?, an anthology of short stories that should have won Hugo Awards, encapsulates the sense of wonder that is SF. LEFT: Spider and Jeanne Robinson's Stardance won both the Hugo and Nebula awards. We wouldn't be surprised if this cover to the novel's original magazine serialization was partly responsible.







Richard Powers as the artist to give his science fiction books a distinctive look. Ballantine had the radical idea that you could publish both in hardcover and paperback at once, and the early Ballantine Books had to compete both in classy bookstores (in those days bookstores sold no paperbacks) and on paperback racks in stations and drugstores. It took special art and special covers to do that and Richard Powers remained a continuing explosion of innovation throughout the decade, and then the next. His stylistic slant became so dominant and fashionable in the paperback market by the end of the 1950s that younger artists had to imitate the Powers' look to sell. Both John Schoenherr and Jack Gaughan told me that they did this early in their careers.

When I was a kid living in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, in 1953, and had only been reading SF for a couple of years, one day I walked into the news store and the propri-

etor, knowing I would buy SF magazines, walked me over to the paperback rack and said I ought to try some. I bought two novels by writers whose short stories I liked, *Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke and *More Than Human* by Theodore Sturgeon. I imprinted on Powers' art as synonymous with wonderful science fiction. I later went back and bought *The Space Merchants* and *Star Science Fiction #1*, also with Powers' covers, and then subscribed to the monthly Ballantine releases mail order to be sure to get every one. Something about the art at the time made a deep and lasting impression on me. It was better that it was not as specific as the magazine covers. It was what really good SF was really about. And remained so—*The Stars My Destination* (Signet) and *The Sirens of Titan* (Dell) both had breathtaking Powers' covers. He was everywhere with the best.

When I began to attend SF conventions in

the 1960s, it was my dream to be able to own one of those miraculous works, and finally I was able to do so. And in meeting Richard Powers, my opinions of his importance to the contemporary vision of science fiction at its best were confirmed.

PERHAPS IT IS APPROPRIATE TO MENTION that SF illustration has always been only a part of his artistic work—like John Schoenherr, Ed Emshwiller—even like H.G. Wells. He did the covers for the Dell classics line in the 1960s (portraits of great writers), record album covers, advertising art. He did many, many mainstream covers (for instance, the original 1950s dust wrapper art for Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*) and has had a continuing and important career as a fine artist, with a specialty in seascapes. His work is in two standard how-to books on seascape painting. He has been a



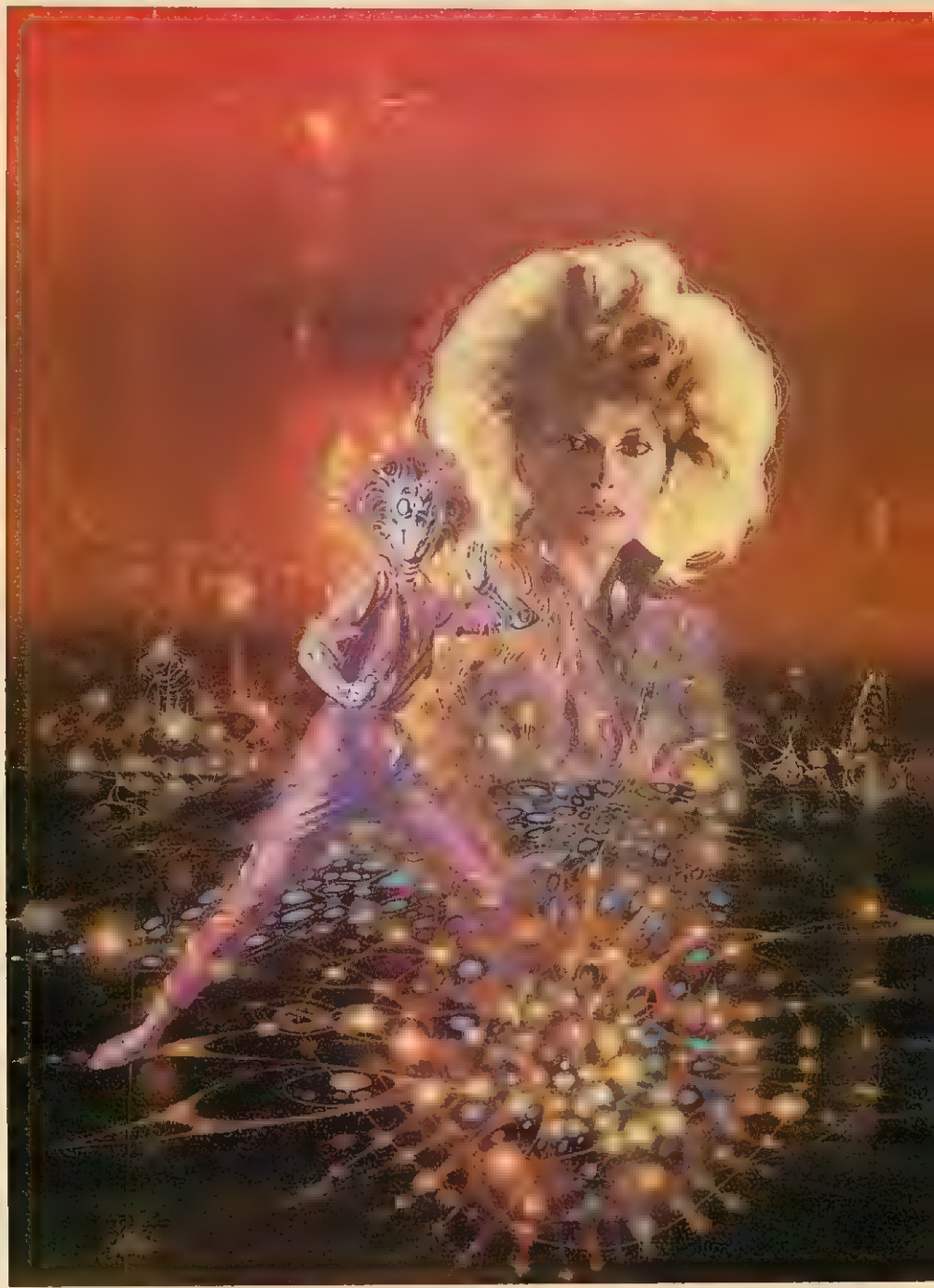
ers' monsters painted on the bottom, to get beaten at tennis and like it, and drink one of Richard's creative concoctions, while he cajoles, heckles, insults, comments, and encourages. Richard is over seventy now but doesn't look a day over sixty. He takes more vitamins than anyone I know, exercises, and plays tennis with a devotion that amounts to a compulsion. He likes to win.

He reads all the time, thinks about what he reads, questions it, challenges it, talks about it with the articulation and experience of a well-honed critical mind. He's proud of having illustrated good SF writers such as Ballard and Clarke (I own the original cover for *Childhood's End*). He's sharp and fast. He thrives on arguing about books and politics and ideas. There's always classical music playing in the background, or jazz (rock and

LEFT: Richard Powers' artwork bursts with creativity — so much so that this image was split down the middle and used for the covers of two separate Fawcett novels. BELOW: Though this woman's face may look familiar, this painting was never published as a novel cover before. You may remember the model's face from when she posed for Powers' cover to Robert Heinlein's Friday.

political cartoonist and has published some jazzy poetry. The Science Fiction Book Club published a portfolio of his art and sold it for years. He's been spending a significant portion of his time on sculpture in recent years. Since the early 1980s he has traveled widely, spending a portion of the year in Spain, and each year has a gallery show of his paintings in Barcelona. He works regularly for Easton Press, illustrating limited editions.

Richard is a joker and a wise-cracker, given to the direct insult. He grew up in Chicago, was a Golden Gloves boxer, and then an army artist during World War II. He's a big guy, more an athlete than an aesthete, with an echoing, brazen laugh. He is an intellectual who likes to read, listen carefully to serious music, argue over matters of taste, politics, or art. Richard is my friend and the godfather to my son Geoffrey. For twenty-five years I have been going up to his home and studio in Ridgefield, Connecticut, to swim in his huge pool with Pow-





folk don't interest him), or a ball game, or one of his old *Bob & Ray* tapes.

We are fortunate to have Richard in SF. Too much of the illustration done over the decades has been, simply put, old-fashioned, in a field where we hold imagination as a primary virtue. But not Richard Powers' work. When he entered the field of SF illustration, he consciously and cleverly borrowed ideas from the whole range of art up to the early 1950s, especially newer art represented in the Museum of Modern Art, and applied them to science fiction. He used the imagery of Tchelychev's *Hide and Seek* for the powerful cover of Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*. The innovative cover for Arthur C. Clarke's *Reach for Tomorrow* is based on a stone sculpture



constructed in a different room. Until the advent of Powers, science fiction illustration was not yet modern.

The new ideas and techniques Powers introduced are in their own way really quite appropriate to science fiction, radically disturbing and provocatively, elusively suggestive, as science fiction itself was a radically disturbing literature at the time. Perhaps most salient was that he introduced the abstract setting to SF illustration, as a background against which foreground images could be juxtaposed—but not necessarily resolved into any pattern, but an abstract one. In Powers' paintings, things and even figures often

seem to float free of gravity, often without even the illusion of a horizon line.

He's done more respectable paintings that one would be proud to hang on the living room wall than any other SF artist, injecting the whole language of modern art into the generally conservative field of paperback illustration, and setting a standard of craft for other artists to work up to. He understands the imagery of science and technology as few other SF artists have.

And I, for one, am pleased to see him featured here for his achievement in SF. I would recommend that you take time to look at Richard's exhibit and to think about whether or not it is the duty of good art to disturb and surprise and challenge you to active thought. You will be entertained. □

UPPER LEFT: This doomsday image was the cover for yet another collection of alternate Hugo-winners edited by Richard A. Lupoff. LOWER LEFT: Richard Powers brought to life the sense of wonder of Clifford Simak's 1974 novel Our Children's Children. ABOVE: Robert Heinlein brought back Lazarus Long and sewed together a myriad of fictional characters in The Number of the Beast, but Powers brought the universe to life.

REDUX

THE ARKARIAN WIND LABORATORY was a squat gray dome spread over two acres of Galt's eastern prairie. The laboratory's acclimatization tunnel formed a long tail to the north. Viewed from the top of the ridge that bordered both the alien settlement and the Galtic lab, the structure resembled a very large energizer. Randalis Menkari's fintips turned pink with laughter at the thought. Energizers were notoriously without humor, so it was not likely Deleb would think it funny, but her other mates in the Menkari pentad, Saris and Amri, would.

She felt Amri tug at the edges of her mind. Though Amri was far away in the pentad homesac, the breeder could easily attune itself to each of its

Communicating with an alien race will not be easy.
In fact, it may be deadly.

BY JULIE A. STEVENS

Illustration by Bob Eggleton





But the aliens have an incredible organ on either side of their head which is capable of receiving and translating mechanical vibrations...

mates' state of mind. Randalis brushed the breeder's probes aside, noting with some relief that Amri left easily. It was merely looking for company. Breeders had the ability to force themselves into another's mind, but it was such a severe breach of etiquette that Amri would only do so in an emergency.

There were any number of reasons Randalis Menkari disliked being on the surface of her planet. Right now, she was most bothered by the rapid changes in temperature on Galt's landmass. Although she had coated her scaled, rectangular body and all six tentacles with layers of pressurized gel before leaving the safety of the water, Galt's sun cut through her as if she wore nothing.

Randalis stretched out her fibrous black fins until they formed a ragged triangle overhead. The shade did little good. Nor did the fact that she was having to walk to Pentheny's lab improve her mood. Her limbs worked well when it came to gesturing, grasping, and working with artist's tools, but supporting her weight on them was another matter. If there was anything she envied about the aliens, it was their use of two stout limbs for nothing but support. Not that they had much choice, since they had opposable digits only on their upper limbs, a curious defect in creatures otherwise admirably suited to the low-pressure, oxygen-poisoned landmasses of Galt.

How Pentheny could bear to spend so much time in this environment, she did not understand. But once the aliens had come, it did not surprise her that Pentheny wanted to be part of the investigative team.

Even before the aliens arrived, her mate had had an uncommon interest in the hostile, windswept lands that jutted from the Arkarian Sea. Perhaps it was his upbringing. He had been reared in the smallest and, as he often pointed out, the most boring of Galt's three tropical seas. Until he settled down with the Menkari pentad, his life had been a restless drift from one laboratory to another across several seas and two continents. Her other three mates in the Menkari pentad had grown up in the cities of the vast Arkarian Sea. She had played childhood games with Amri long before Amri became the pentad breeder. Saris, a gender-specific female like herself, though many seasons older, had attended the same university for most of one season until Randalis left to concentrate on art. Even Deleb, stolid and humorless in a way she used to associate with those less intelligent, had been raised in a clan of energizers from the largest Arkarian city.

"You are such snobs," Pentheny had said cheerfully not long after Deleb introduced him to the rest of the pentad. "Nine major seas and hundreds of minor ones all over Galt, but you think only the Arkarian Sea counts. Fortunately for the Menkari genepool, that is not altogether true."

In spite of the blazing sun, Randalis shivered as she recalled that first conversation with Pentheny. She had been drawn to his easy laughter, and had wondered where Deleb could have found him. Pentheny had joked about that, too. "Your pentad needed a gender-specific male. I was the first one Deleb came to. Its desperation was quite appealing." In fact, Pentheny and Deleb had once worked together, and Randalis knew Deleb well enough to know the energizer had made up its mind to invite Pentheny into the pentad before it broached the subject to the rest of its mates. The speed with which Pentheny accepted the proposal suggested that he, too, had given the matter some thought.

But Pentheny was mistaken about the assets of his genepool. It harbored a tragedy for the Menkari pentad. It had been a full season since the pentad had known for certain that Pentheny was dying. The virus was common, not contagious, and hardly ever fatal unless certain genetic factors combined to enhance the viral dangers. In the tropi-

cal seas where Pentheny had come to adulthood, his lack of immunity had caused no harm. But the healers said it was remarkable he had lived and worked in the Arkarian Sea for as long as he had. Often, Randalis wished that he had never left his tropical home or that she had never met him, so she would not have to face losing him.

She forced herself not to dwell upon the past. It was important to spend as much time as possible with Pentheny. Only that desire brought her here. Saris often visited her mate at his laboratory, while Amri and Deleb could communicate empathically with Pentheny whenever they wished. Randalis preferred to wait for his periodic returns to the pentad homesac. But in the last few days, she had been overwhelmed by an urgent need to see him at his work. She suspected that she was gathering memories of him while he still lived.

A few of the aliens watched as she approached the laboratory. The aliens were odd-looking, but not unpleasantly so. They wore protective suits that left their faces and tiny eyes uncovered. She knew from her discussions with Pentheny that the aliens were virtually blind. They had only one retina in each eye, which accounted for the communication problems between them and the Nine-Seas Council.

"With limited depth perception and a short visual range, they don't even know we're talking to them most of the time," Pentheny had warned her. "But the aliens have an incredible organ on either side of their head which is capable of receiving and translating mechanical vibrations into nerve impulses. They produce and detect vibrations so minute our best equipment cannot measure them."

The alien settlement consisted of a series of hard-edged cubes strung out along the shore. Randalis could not help wondering why the creatures surrounded themselves with such ugliness. Did they derive any comfort from their hard square boxes with solid, unshifting walls? Occasionally Pentheny tried to persuade her that rigid structures had a harsh, utilitarian beauty. "Surely you can appreciate forms that fight the elements rather than yield to them," he argued. She granted him his opinion, but she still found the alien structures graceless.

Several of the aliens stopped to watch her as she passed by. Since they stared openly at her, she assumed it was not a breach of etiquette to do the same. Pentheny had been after her for some time to incorporate models of the aliens into her art work. She had resisted, but now that she could see the creatures at close range, the idea took on greater substance. As unobtrusively as she could, she removed her tools and a collection kit from the pouch under her back tentacle. She sketched quick holographic images into the circuitry of the kit. The aliens appeared curious, so she held the kit out to the nearest one. The alien handled the sphere carefully, turning it over several times with both upper limbs. But it was clear that the alien was unable to assimilate the images imbedded in the kit. Apparently the aliens' tactile senses were as limited as their vision. She wondered if Galtians were as frustrating to these creatures. But since the aliens' skin tones, that part that could be seen outside their clothing, did not readily change colors, it was hard to tell if they experienced any emotions at all.

Randalis gathered up her tools and the collection kit. As she approached the acclimatization tunnel, she could see from the rows of activated identity screens that the laboratory was filled to capacity. It had been several seasons since the aliens had first come. Galtic diplomats, scientists, and philosophers vied for space inside the complex, all with differing ideas as to how best to approach the aliens. Some were worried that the aliens meant to establish a base, or worse, a colony. Others saw colonization of the largely uncharted landmass as a unique opportunity to observe the creatures without having to put up with them in day-to-day life. For now, given com-

munications problems that were proving insurmountable, each side settled for observation of the other. It did appear as though the aliens were part of a scientific team. They seemed content to tag, observe, and monitor Galtians; just as they allowed themselves to be tagged, observed, and monitored.

If Pentheny was to remain with the investigation team, the Menkari pentad had no choice but to allow their lives to be observed by the aliens to the extent that the aliens were able to do so through Pentheny. The pentad had agreed, partly because it was unlikely the aliens could accurately interpret their own data, and partly because Pentheny was so excited about his participation.

His task for the last three seasons had been to chart the activities of one particular alien, a gender-specific male he named Fog. "Because he's mysterious and insubstantial," Pentheny said. His enthusiasm illuminated the pentad's homesac. "This is my chance to know more about one creature than anyone else can ever know. All over Galt, there are anthropologists who would give a fortune to trade places with me."

Fog wore a tag developed by Galtian researchers to track migrant sea animals. The tag's sensors relayed a great deal of information about alien physiology but nothing at all about how or what the creatures thought. Pentheny spent much of his time trying to intuit some rational emotion from the alien's actions. Occasionally, and more often since Pentheny's illness had been diagnosed, Randalis worried about her mate's behavior. He had always been intense with regard to his work, but his desire to understand Fog bordered on the obsessive. On his frequent journeys home, he brought his data coils with him, going over and over the myriad types of information he had assembled on Fog. Even Randalis found herself fascinated with certain aspects of Fog's behavior and curious if Fog was at the same moment reviewing his own data. But for the rest of the pentad, guessing what a particular action of Fog's might mean was a game. It was obviously much more to Pentheny.

Randalis pressed the back of her smallest tentacle against the identity screen, then waited as the doors closed and the pressure increased. By the time she had pulled the gel from her body in long strips, sea water was being pumped into the tunnel and she started to relax.

Two aliens were watching the process through the transparent southern wall of the tunnel. Within their enclosed space, they stood far apart, as though they were enemies. She recalled Pentheny's observation that distance must have different connotations to the aliens. They rarely touched one another and went out of their way to be alone, or at least apart from one another. While in most Galtic cultures distance signaled anger or fear, it did not seem so with the aliens.

So much about the aliens defied logic. They built machines with the capacity to move between stars, yet appeared to have no symbiotic relationships among themselves. What did they feel, she wondered. How did they share their feelings? Did they love each other the way the members of a pentad did?

She knew how they mated. Pentheny had regaled the pentad one slightly intoxicated evening with ribald descriptions of alien sexual habits.

"Only in pairs," he said. "And it takes hardly any time."

"Pitiful," Saris commented in soft violet hues. "Though I suppose finding just one compatible mate does simplify matters."

"But that's the best part," Pentheny responded. "So far, Fog has mated with three different gender-specific females, always one at a time."

Deleb had communicated very little during its mate's description of the aliens, but now its abdomen turned a warning shade of yellow.

Amri, the pentad breeder, caught the energizer's emotion immediately and flooded the sac with anxiety.

"Too much for your delicate sensibilities?" Pentheny teased.

The energizer was not amused. "They're animals."

"True, but intelligent animals who've managed to survive in an environment that none of us could tolerate for long."

Saris reached out with her abdominal tentacle and grabbed Amri. "I wish you'd be careful with your stories. I think you like to see Amri and Deleb upset. Besides, the environment the aliens come from

must have been hospitable to them; how else could they evolve a breeding system that requires so few caretakers?"

"We don't actually know how they take care of their young. Maybe they do have caretakers in their own world. It's hard to make assumptions based only on our observations. Who knows if they are a representative sample of their kind? I would give a lot just to ask that question of Fog."

That conversation had taken place months ago, but Randalis knew that little progress had been made since then. She floated out of the acclimatization tunnel into the first of the lab cells. The interior labs were created entirely from sacs, allowing the water to flow through with equal pressure on either side. Scientists and technicians brushed past, gliding their scaled bodies alongside hers.

She finally located Pentheny in one of the interior labs. He was huddled with two colleagues over a series of drawings on plastic sheets. The stark, flat representations looked like the marks a child at play might make, though she knew they came from the aliens and represented a communications retrieval system. The aliens worked easily with two-dimensional materials and seemed to prefer the form to any other, much to the frustration of the Galtians.

The aliens did store some information in more complex forms, but only with the assistance of machines that could not function in the seawater environment of the Galtic labs.

RANDALIS FOUND THE DOCUMENT PRODUCED by the aliens interesting as an art form. They apparently did not use holographic models, which would have been much more useful. These sheets appeared to be a diagram of alien body parts. "Interior organs," Pentheny said when she looked up at him. "We don't know what most of them do, but at least we can tell approximately where everything is."

He talked slowly, his coloring changing with more difficulty than he had ever shown in the past. It occurred to Randalis that this was how Pentheny would die, moving slower and slower until eventually everything halted. He was three seasons younger than she, and if the health assessors were correct, he would not last another season.

"I modeled two aliens I saw on the surface," Randalis said, pulling out the artist's kit. Pentheny took the sphere in his long upper tentacle and searched through the circuitry to locate her images. The tip of his tentacle and the sphere itself grew shaded as he probed. When he found her most recent work, he examined it carefully. "I recognize this one. We have a team monitoring him. Of course it is led by an Arkarian energizer who is an idiot."

"While you are doing a masterful job of communicating with Fog," she retorted, taking back her kit.

He ignored her comment. "Maybe you could use these drawings to model Fog's interior organs."

"I'd be guessing about size and third-dimensional characteristics. I doubt it would be helpful."

"Anything would be helpful," he said bitterly. "I've got no time. All I want to do is establish a basis for communication. We've got two intelligent species here. There has to be a way for us to speak to one another."

Pentheny's body was yellowing in agitation. "Three seasons of research and I still don't know where Fog comes from."

Randalis was torn between wanting to comfort her mate and understanding his need to communicate his frustration. She did nothing and Pentheny grew simultaneously more angry and depressed.

"He's tried in so many ways to show me. He used to bring packages of those damn two-dimensional forms and use them to explain his homeland. I knew that was what he was doing, yet we could not make each other understand. I must have sent the forms he gave me to twenty other experts, and no one could make sense of them."

Pentheny picked up the luminescent neuronic coils that contained portions of his data on Fog and threw them onto Randalis' tentacles. Waves of jumbled information assaulted her until she untangled the

coils and tied them back onto the fiber racks that lined the sac walls.

"I gave him access to all of our information systems. You know what he did? He tried to cut the coils into pieces. He had no capacity to assimilate information from the coils. And neither did any of his equipment."

"I showed my kit to the aliens," Randalis said. "They couldn't reach into it."

"The biological capability does not exist for them. We cannot demonstrate what they have no power to imagine."

Randalis stroked him along the silvery sides of his body. "Amri said your team was going to try emotion as a basis of communication."

"We've considered it. We've considered everything and we're running out of ideas. There's something very attractive about the idea of universal emotional constants."

"Amri especially likes the idea that love is the same for all creatures, whatever their homeworld," Randalis said.

"So much for the romantic notions of breeders. Our initial attempts have not worked. We produce specific chemical changes in response to strong emotion, but it's not enough to register with the aliens. I had hoped for a while that we had found a way. My teammates are certain the aliens' brain structures operate on electro-neuronic impulses much the way ours do. We tried various strong emotions. Love, of course, because Amri isn't the only empath who thinks love is a universal constant. And pain—on their own terms. The aliens do appear to experience a physical sensation of pain, but nothing that translates into what we can understand. Perhaps the whole idea was a mistake. It's unsound to project Galtic motivations onto alien species which may be incapable of such emotions."

Randalis glowed pink with laughter. "That's Saris talking, not you."

"She said it first but I agree. At any rate, I want you to see Fog."

Pentheny led her through a series of tubes into an observation sac that abutted a hard-walled opaque structure that appeared to be anchored to the sea floor. Portions of the walls had been cut out and replaced with transparent materials. A number of aliens roamed the structure.

Pentheny unfolded a monitor from the wall and tossed it to Randalis. As soon as the coil wound around her upper tentacle, she could pick out the alien called Fog. The monitor fed her all kinds of information regarding the alien's biological functioning, only part of which she understood. She was an artist, not a scientist, though for Pentheny's sake she tried to show some interest. When she looked up, Fog had moved nearer the transparent wall and was clearly monitoring them with some sort of solid disk he held in one upper limb.

"Do you ever wonder how much he knows about us?" she asked.

"A lot about our habits and nothing about our thoughts. If frustration was an emotional constant, Fog and I would have been in steady communication seasons ago."

This was not a new dialogue. Pentheny's longing to establish communication with Fog or any of the aliens had been the staple of discussion within the Menkari pentad for a long time.

"Would you go with them, if you could, and if they were leaving?" she asked.

"Not unless everyone in our pentad could come. And not until I could talk with them." His backfin spread out as he relaxed. "It used to be enough just to see things that were different. Then I wanted to understand what I saw." He gestured toward the transparent wall where Fog still stood, apparently observing the two of them. "Now I want these strange, intelligent creatures to understand me."

"You can't stay here," Randalis said softly. "Whatever part you had in the project is over."

"Is that why you've come? To bring me home?"

"The data you've already gathered must be coordinated. That can be done best at home. Surely you want it done before you..."

"Die?" he said helpfully. "Whatever I don't do, others from my team will." But his color deepened and she realized that she was not the only member of the pentad persuading him.

"Amri?"

"No, Amri would be much gentler than Deleb, who doesn't seem prepared to accept any of my excuses. It's all right. I've got nothing left to contribute anyway."

Randalis helped Pentheny gather his data coils and the meager possessions he kept at the laboratory.

"Do you suppose I should give this back to Fog?" Pentheny wondered aloud as he held up the large silver disk the aliens had fitted around his back tentacle.

Randalis tapped the smooth surface of the disk. There was no change in the color or texture, no indication that it was registering information of any kind. "If the aliens really want to know about us," she responded, "they should have the opportunity to see how we die."

Pentheny's red coloring deepened in agreement and the tag remained on his tentacle.

RANDALIS SPREAD HER FINS TO TAKE FULL advantage of the north current. It was feeding hour, which meant there were few others abroad to impede her journey. Just as she came around the corner nearest to her pentad's homesac, she felt the warm, encompassing presence of a breeder. Seconds later, the silver-scaled, nearly featureless form of Amri crashed into her. Randalis automatically reached out with her lower tentacles to hold Amri tight against her body. She opened her mind to her breeder-mate only to be overwhelmed by Amri's anxiety, panic, and, finally, relief. Randalis comforted the breeder, sending as much calm as she could, simultaneously searching the breeder's emotions for news of Pentheny. There was no detectable change in the anxiety level Amri showed for Pentheny. Not for the first time, Randalis was grateful not to have been born a breeder. Amri not only had its own feelings, but it shared the fears and sadness of everyone in the pentad for Pentheny's impending death.

At the entrance to their homesac, both Amri and Randalis fed into Deleb's energy shield. The relief of the entire pentad radiated from Amri. Randalis could see how tired the energizer was so she went to it first, opening her mind to Deleb to reassure it that she was safe. The energizer's bright cilia scanned her from top to bottom before giving the soft green glow of contentment.

Saris was briskly ordering everyone around, something she usually did with more subtlety.

We're all so scared, Randalis thought. They had good reason. Pentheny was too ill to remain in the homesac and had been at the health center for several days. It was likely that after he died, the whole pentad would dissolve. Deleb would not easily agree to another partner, while Saris, however much she loved Pentheny, would demand that they replace their only gender-specific male as soon as possible.

Randalis fed with her pentad, and immediately afterward fell asleep. She awoke much later with Amri cuddled into a ball next to her and Deleb spread out along her back. She disentangled herself and floated free to find Saris.

Her mate had fallen asleep over the neuronic coils filled with luminescent notations. Randalis gently pried them from Saris' tentacle.

Saris jerked awake, reaching for the coils she had been studying. "I promised Pentheny I'd have these in order for him. He wants to at least finish cataloging the research to date."

"He's barely conscious most of the time, and then he's coherent only if Amri or Deleb enter his mind directly. If there's material to be catalogued, let his team do it."

"All of the aliens who came three seasons ago are still alive. Do you ever wonder how long they live? If they can get sick the way we do? Or what happens when they die?"

"Maybe they don't die," Randalis said lightly, then regretted her remark as Saris' color deepened. She led her mate back to the circle where their mates were asleep. "Pentheny's right. It's just a matter of communication. We don't know that they feel because they do not manifest it in any way that we can measure."

The pentad spent most of its waking time at the health center in the isolation sac where Pentheny now lived. Energizers and technicians swarmed around the edges of the sac, monitoring banks of delicate

Did everyone feel this way at the moment of death? But why had no other pentad described it? Pentheny struggled to free himself from his body.

equipment. It hurt Randalis to look at her mate's virus-ravaged body. It had only been a matter of days since she had brought him back from the surface laboratory, but it was as if he had stopped fighting the virus, as if he was welcoming death.

Deleb and Amri were almost continuously joined with Pentheny now. When they felt he was near death, they would link Saris and Randalis into a union of all five minds. Not all Galtians were able to form a union at the point of death. Some died in accidents, others died unmated. But if it was possible to die as part of a union, it was what every Galtian ultimately wanted.

Much as she cared for Pentheny and much as she knew the comfort the union would bring her mate, Randalis did not look forward to it. She found empathic contacts disconcerting in the best of times. But she knew she did not want to share any thoughts of failure Pentheny might have. And her own grief was so overwhelming she did not want to add the sadness of her mates to it.

It was so unfair. She created her art objects, and whether or not they brought acclaim, they would outlive her. On her own terms she had already accomplished something. The truth was that if Pentheny and his team had completed their research in his lifetime, what he left behind would be far greater than any of her art. Yet he was leaving nothing behind but raw data that led nowhere.

Deleb's gentle probe at the borders of her consciousness startled her. She glanced down at the isolation sac.

"Now? Are you certain?"

Deleb was yellow-gray with concern. He carefully but insistently pushed past her resistance. Deleb was more controlled but less powerful than Amri, who used the entry Deleb gained into Randalis' mind to assault her with emotions from every side. It took her a long while to sort through the flood of feelings to find Saris and then Pentheny.

"It's definitely time, isn't it?" Pentheny's thoughts were loud and strong, so strong that Randalis could almost forget his illness. She felt strangely disembodied, with a near-physical sensation of freedom. Flight, she thought. It was like this to fly above the surface of Galt where the atmosphere offered so little resistance. Then she was overcome with confusion. These were Pentheny's feelings, she realized. But what did he know of flight? Where did this great weightlessness come from? He could never have experienced these feelings before. Did everyone feel this way at the moment of death? But why had no other pentad described it? Pentheny was trying to soar, struggling to free himself from his body.

Only when she touched into the mind of Saris was she forcibly reminded of the grief that encompassed the entire pentad. Saris was as surprised as Randalis by the sensations Pentheny was experiencing. But neither Deleb nor Amri seemed to have an explanation.

Pentheny strained toward something, not fighting his mates it seemed, but trying to carry them with him. Then, as quickly as it had started, it ended.

Randalis felt the exact moment that Pentheny broke free of his body and plunged the rest of the pentad into darkness. There was a sharp emptiness where his thoughts, his feelings, his life had been.

For a moment Randalis wanted only to be freed from the union, to keep her sorrow to herself. She felt Amri tighten its grip on her mind as the breeder radiated both pain and sadness. Amri was trying to comfort her in the midst of its own anguish. The selflessness of the breeder shamed Randalis, and slowly she reached toward Amri and allowed the breeder to do its work.

But she became aware of something else, an intangible yet very

real blackness that threatened to drive away the comfort of the breeder and the energizer. Amri fought frantically to maintain its balance while Deleb rushed headlong toward the dark. Still linked with Deleb, Randalis followed the energizer into the blackness.

Suddenly she was rocked with bizarre and discordant thoughts all running together. Yellow, black, and gray blocked out every other color as though anxiety and depression and sadness were the only emotions that existed. Sensation after sensation came at her, intense but unidentifiable feelings that appeared to contradict one another but all joined with a devastating sense of loss.

Such sorrow. As great as hers, yet different in ways she could not begin to understand. She wanted to offer comfort. What she could not do herself, she wanted Amri and Deleb to provide. Surrounded as she was with fantastic, indecipherable images, she could no longer tell if Deleb was with her, but she reached out to the energizer. If she could see nothing else about this mind she was touching, she at least knew, absolutely, that both she and this mind were reacting to Pentheny's death.

Somewhere in the background, she felt Amri yanking at her mind, trying to pull her apart from Deleb and from whatever force they had encountered. The breeder was clumsy with terror but clung determinedly to Randalis' thoughts. It seemed to Randalis that Amri must have hold of Saris as well, though she could not directly enter her mate's mind. Everywhere she turned, she was assaulted with intermittent vivid and grotesque images. The only part she understood was one encompassing emotion, a terrible passionate sadness.

Amri must have discovered a way to sever the link, for Randalis abruptly found herself alone with her thoughts and locked into the circle of Saris' upper tentacles. Amri hovered anxiously nearby.

"What was happening? What was that?" Randalis asked Deleb, too shaken to even attempt another empathic contact with the energizer.

Deleb looked very tired, but there was a glow about him that Randalis had not seen since Pentheny had first fallen ill. "Grief," the energizer said softly. "It feels grief."

"What does?"

Saris answered for Deleb. "Pentheny's alien. The one called Fog. When his grief was strongest, we were all able to enter his mind."

"Maybe he didn't know that Pentheny was dying," Deleb added. "But once he realized Pentheny was dead, his grief was as strong as ours and was manifested chemically in much the same ways."

Deleb was resorting to scientific explanations that Randalis could barely comprehend. But she wanted to be sure she grasped the important part.

"We communicated with Fog? We talked with him?"

A faint pink cast of amusement colored Deleb. "It wasn't exactly a conversation. We probably frightened him as much as anything else. But he was definitely feeling Pentheny's loss. We shared that feeling and understood it in exactly the way we were meant to. For the first time, four Galtians had mind-to-mind contact with an alien."

Saris pulled Deleb close to her. "Let Pentheny's team at the laboratory figure out how to use this information. What we know is that there is at least one strong emotion—grief—that they experience the way we do. It's an opening. That's all Pentheny wanted to find, and he succeeded."

Randalis nestled closer in the grip and comfort of her pentad. If grief provided a door to communication with the aliens, she and her mates could provide plenty of it. But for the first time in a long while, she could think of Pentheny and his death with subtle shades of green contentment. □

IN 2027, AMERICAN WRITER Dominic McLock of Black River Falls, Wisconsin, received belated public acknowledgment of his genius when the Swedish Academy bestowed on him that year's Nobel Prize for Literature. A photo of the cherubic-looking writer sitting at his antiquated Apple wearing a Russian cap, *guttapercha* galoshes and a candy-striped thong bikini became poster fodder and immediately sold millions of copies across the globe. After toiling in obscurity for over thirty years, the darling of only a fanatically proprietary cult, Dominic McLock suddenly rose to stratospheric heights of international fame. Predictably, everyone remotely literate and sufficiently old enough to do so claimed to have discovered his multivolume masterwork, *Chronicles of a Laminated Tomorrow*, an epic comedy of manners and technological innovation, all the way back in 1996 when its first installment, *The Lost Cursor*, appeared from a shoe-string publishing house that sold eighty-six copies of the title and toppled bangbang into unlamented bankruptcy.

McLock, already well into his fifties when *The Lost Cursor* flash-evaporated over the literary landscape, kept writing. He found other supporters—madpersons, idiots, eccentrics—both to encourage and to publish him. Hence, *Chronicles of a Laminated Tomorrow* grew by an installment a year for the next two and a half decades. Sales climbed modestly, steadily. Each addition to McLock's *Chronicles* attracted new proponents and racked up

growing numbers of nominations for obscure literary prizes: The Frickle Hambly Award, the Hypertext Medallion, the Enemies of Aesthetic Mediocrity Citation, etc. And, as book followed book, each had not only an old-fashioned hardcopy incarnation but also a powerful concomitant life as video artifact, CD-ROM package, audio tape, interactive computer game, continuously metamorphosing wall hanging, psychedelic lozenge, and either sheathless talking birth control aid or coinlike water-soluble fertility drug (depending on the biocondition and procreative philosophy of the individual consumer). Each of these avatars of McLock's mockingly christened *Chronicles* advanced, deepened, glossed, and recast every other so-called chapter/installment in its revolutionary metastructure. *Pixilated Pixels* from 2011, sold well enough to appear briefly on the *New York Times* Bestseller List (in a footnote, as a likely upandcomer) and to become a glib catch phrase on a popular radio wranglecast. A dozen or so young McLock wannabes (at that point in his career, only a recluse would have wanted such limited notoriety) strove to emulate his style, his voice, his tone, his jolting impact on the collective unconscious of the five thousand or so fans who had actually deigned to read him.

If McLock had any clear precursors, said the two national critics who paid him any significant heed, they were bona fide inventors like Proust, Joyce, and Eliot, who left in their wake not flourishing schools but rather thunderstruck and largely impotent gangs of admirers. In many ways, pontificated one of these critics, McLock "subsumed" Proust, Joyce, and Eliot in his own sensibility; further,

he "extended their sociopsychical criticisms in the comprehensive astuteness of his judgments and the technical virtuosity of his vision." (*Say what?* moaned the people who read this nincompoop, a group even smaller than the one that adored McLock.) In any event, McLock's follow-up to *Pixilated Pixels*, 2013's *The Monitor and Merry Mack*, which some now regard as cryptically autobiographical, was remandered in all its forms within six months, plunging the author back into the ironclad obscurity to which he and his most loyal champions had long since grown accustomed.

Years passed, and Dominic McLock continued to create a book (video/CD-ROM/audio tape/computer game, etc.) a year, each one complex, idiosyncratic, and difficult. In Europe—particularly among Florentines, Croats, Danes, and Parisians—translations of the first twelve installments of *Chronicles of a Laminated Tomorrow*, all in a single indexed package, sold in staggering quantities and convinced the movershakers of their respective literary establishments that the provincial clods of the United States had once again neglected a homegrown genius. They began touting his work as imaginative, sad, funny, pathbreaking, and unprecedentedly profound. Meanwhile, back home in Black River Falls, McLock was writing ever briefer and more runic booklong chapters to his masterpiece, installments so surrealistic, so uncompromisingly dadaesque, that the only two American critics formerly receptive of his *oeuvre* confessed in print—to legions of the ignorant and/or blasé—that the scalding brilliance of his latest writings had left them panting to keep up, baffled beyond insight, hum-

THE ALZHEIMER LAUREATE

We have seen the future of literature, and its name is—*Dominic McLock?*

BY MICHAEL BISHOP
Illustration by Mike Wright

DOMINIC McLOCK



NOBEL PRIZE AUTHOR OF
CHRONICLES OF LAMINATED TOMORROW

bled by their fight to interpret that which McLock had so incandescently shaped.

Today, most literary historians—American, European, South American, East African—agree that Dominic McLock would have received the Nobel Prize a mere five years after the release of the indexed package of the *Chronicles*' first twelve books, if not for the hidebound conservatism of several of the Academy's most intellectually decrepit members. As a similar crowd had once repeatedly denied Jorge Luis Borges the laurel, these same reactionaries, or their heirs, likewise repeatedly blackballed Dominic McLock, who bore their annual snubs with a dignity and lack of recrimination that may well have sprung from his total indifference to their deliberations. By 2025, however, the last of McLock's detractors, those Academy members who did not know a hard drive from a drivetrain or a hypertext card from a hypnotist, had died; and the appearance of the

arcane thirtieth book of his *Chronicles*, charmingly titled *Yoyo y Yo*, provided both the excuse and the impetus for his admirers in the Academy to vote him the award.

WHEN HE FLEW TO STOCKHOLM, Sweden, from his home in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, to accept the prize, Dominic McLock was eighty-nine years old. The citation for his Nobel commented favorably—fulsomely, some later said—on the uniqueness of his vision, the teasing opacity of his style, the gnomic delicacy of his wit, the prophetic sweep of his social criticism, the sureness with which he grasped and spotlighted technological issues, and the avantgarde catholicity of his taste in product packaging. McLock tottered forward to receive his award and to recite his acceptance speech. Along with his plum-and-ivory tuxedo jumpsuit, he wore the Russian hat and the galoshes that later

appeared in the poster commemorating his victory; he may have also worn the same candy-striped thong bikini, but his jumpsuit conveniently hid that conjectural undergarment. Once at the podium, McLock delivered neither the shortest nor the longest Nobel address on record, but certainly one of the most striking; it consisted in its entirety of a conjugation of the English verb *to f*—in the present, past, and future tenses. (It appeared for a moment that McLock would also essay either the corresponding perfect or conditional tenses, but he halted, said, “*Boom boom bosilac*,” and grinned soppily.) This address was received in what one attendee termed “appalled silence.” Upon someone's tentative effort to start some tension breaking applause, however, it rapidly turned into loud and persistent clapping, gleeful cries of “*Bravo!*” and “*Attsa way to tell em, Patric!*” and a tsunami of photographic activity. McLock had scored a surprise TKO at the ceremony.

Under the inspiration of this overdue prize, the laureate returned to Wisconsin and wrote installment after installment of *Chronicles of a Laminated Tomorrow*. His publishers, also under the impetus of the award, kept issuing these new works in all the various media long after they ceased to turn a profit anywhere, a failure primarily owing to the fact that each new addition to McLock's belatedly celebrated masterwork seemed more gibberish-laden, opaque, and lacking in either coherence or structure than the one before. Except as a poster boy and a radiowranglefest staple, where his squeaky cry of “*Boom boom bosilac*” acquired the status of a shibboleth, Dominic McLock was abandoned by a number of his staunchest fans as well as by the general public. New medications slowed his descent into Absolute Babbledom, but he refused gene therapy and eventually died alone, wearing the distinctive weird outfit in which he still decorated the walls of so many literature instructors and dilettantes worldwide, and the last “words” on the screen of his Mac, preserved in the museum that had once been his house, are “*Y y y y n y*.”

McLock sleeps the everlasting sleep in a family graveyard outside Black River Falls. The custodian of the site, a former president of the Dominic McLock Booster Club, always points out to visitors that during the last month of his life the laureate wrote his own epitaph, which one may see today inscribed on the face of his handsome salmon-colored tombstone:

Hickory dickery
McLock,

Dominic Celestine

Feb. 7, 1939—Sep. 23, 2039

“*what gohz aroun cumz aroun*” □

Explore the red planet Mars with tour guide Ray Bradbury.



Science may have destroyed the Mars of myth, but it lives on in books and games.

MARS, THE RED PLANET, HAS ALWAYS BEEN A favorite subject for science fiction writers, from H.G. Wells' hideous invaders and Edgar Rice Burroughs' barbarian adventures to more recent efforts by Kim Stanley Robinson, Greg Bear, Ben Bova, and others to present a more realistic vision, one that agrees with our current knowledge of conditions there. But the most haunting vision of Mars that SF has ever presented is that found in the interlinked series of short stories by Ray Bradbury, collected as *The Martian Chronicles*, a Mars colonized by humans in place of the not quite vanished Martians, a place that has its own unique magic.

Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles Adventure Game* (Byron Preiss Multimedia/Simon & Schuster, SRP \$49.95), a CD-ROM designed to run under Windows, is an attempt to translate the impact of the book to a new medium. Although it does not derive directly from any of the individual stories, it attempts to capture the feel of the book and translates it into a coherent adventure story. Game-play opens with a brief prologue extracted from the book, while animations of ships traveling through space and landing on the desolate Martian landscape begin to establish the setting. For those who want enhanced background material, you can delay game-play and instead watch a series of fifteen brief interviews with Ray Bradbury or eight animated sequences drawn from the stories, but these are asides that have no impact on the game proper.

Actual game-play starts inside a spaceship. You have recently landed on Mars, in the supposedly deserted city of Xi. An Earthman named Stendahl has built a mansion in the midst of the abandoned community, but he has disappeared, along with a merchant named Sam Eliot, an investigator, and a possibly homicidal spaceman. Your goal is to plumb the secrets of Xi and locate the archives in which reside knowledge of a possible supertechnology, while avoiding human and Martian enemies.

After a short briefing in which this is all explained, your first order of business is to select the equipment which you will carry on your expedition. The choices include an atmospheric helmet, an automatic mapping instrument, a scanner, a recorder, and a device that will allow you to instantaneously transport yourself back to the ship. These tools are represented by icons at the bottom of the screen, which activate when selected by mouse click. The spaceship also contains a console that allows you to store the images you've recorded and analyze artifacts recovered from Xi. Since there is no penalty for choosing all of this equipment, there seems no real point to making them optional, and they are all of use once you leave the ship and start exploring outside.

That particular feat is accomplished by stepping into a transporter tube in your ship. You emerge outside, only a few steps from Xi. Although you can make a few moves in other directions, these serve no purpose, and the landscapes, while not badly done, are not sufficiently interesting to make this short exploration worthwhile. There are in fact so few areas available to explore, the game is mildly claustrophobic; although you have the freedom to explore things in almost any order, the number of choices is rather limited.

Xi, for example, is barely a town, let alone a city, with less than a dozen buildings, each of which you may explore and each of which contains one or more puzzles. In this respect, *The Martian Chronicles* attempts to replicate the success of *The Seventh Guest*, *Myst*, and similar games, which are played in much the same fashion. To win, you need to solve a series of logic puzzles, the solutions of some of which provide the keys to others. Although you can explore the structures randomly, the solution must be reached in a reasonably linear fashion. There is also a time constraint; you begin your mission with twelve hours of game time (not real time) to solve the entire sequence (although fortunately it is possible to save games periodically, so that time lost on fruitless efforts can be reclaimed and put to better use).

The buildings include a jail, Stendahl's house, an art museum, a store, a cave, a power center, and a few other structures. In some of these there are concealed Martian crystals which provide an energy bonus and clues to the location of the mysterious archives. Interaction with the environment is achieved by toggling between movement and manipulative modes with the cursor. The scanner is very useful here because some walls conceal doorways into other rooms, which you can only pass through once you have seen them by scanning the area. The scanner also acts as a magnifying glass and translator, which makes it possible to read worn inscriptions, Martian documents, and examine closely the elements of some of the puzzles. The process of exploration is oversimplified, however. For one thing, most of the settings are detail poor; it's almost always obvious which elements need to be examined because they're almost always the only artifacts available.

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In those cases in which they're invisible, the scanner light always illuminates when there's something to see, so by simply turning toward each wall or object in turn, you have a visual cue telling you when to scan and when not to bother.

A more effective innovation is the occasional image of an ancient Martian walking through the city streets, or other reflections of a time long past. Some of the images turn out to be real, and it is possible to interact with these characters in a limited fashion. They may be friendly and helpful, or hostile and dangerous, depending on the situation and your response. The dialogue is not free form, however. You are presented with two to four possible responses to each conversational gambit, and your choice dictates what will happen next. There's also a varied but undistinguished soundtrack, different melodies activated by your action or location.

In terms of playability, the game is about average. Although some of the puzzles present a bit of a challenge, most can be solved by trial and error. They include moving tiles into the right position to reveal a map, touching artifacts in the proper order to achieve some objective like unlocking a door. Sometimes the linkage between cause and effect defies logic, a flaw found in many of this style of game; there is no reason, for example, why picking up a jewel in one building should turn off a forcefield in another. Solutions based on logic are much more satisfying than those reached by happenstance.

The teleportation button is convenient for moving back and forth to the ship, which is necessary to recharge your energy level and sometimes to review new messages from Earth, but you can't change the settings to reach a new destination. When I got trapped in one building, I teleported back to the ship, but could only return to my imprisonment, not pursue my investigations elsewhere. The necessity to toggle back and forth between movement and interactive modes is an annoying distraction that could have been avoided.

For those too impatient to investigate Xi systematically, there are some low level hints in



Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* includes interviews with the author.

the instruction booklet that tip you off about some of the better places to look. If you need help solving the puzzles, there's even more detailed information in a text file included on the CD-ROM. On the whole, you'll probably be able to solve the entire puzzle with a couple of weekend's work, which is probably getting your money's worth, but I doubt anyone will be waiting impatiently for a sequel.

Although there have been a great many novels spun off from computer games, there have been only a handful of games like this one developed from novels and stories. The earliest genre works to be so transformed included Stephen King's *The Mist* and Roger Zelazny's *Nine Princes in Amber*. If you're interested in exploring other worlds based on SF and fantasy writers, you might look for *Ringworld* and *Return to Ringworld*, based on Larry Niven's novel, *Gateway*, from Fred Pohl's Heechee series, *Dune* from Frank Herbert, *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*, based on Harlan Ellison's short story, *Neuromancer* from William Gibson, *Discworld* from Terry Pratchett, *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas R. Adams, and a recent game based on the Isaac Asimov inspired *Robot City* series. There are also games based on William Gibson's *Johnny Mnemonic* and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* *Blade Runner*, but these are derived more from the films than the books. A game based on Arthur C. Clarke's *Rama* novels is also forthcoming. □

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IMMERSION

Continued from page 59

Leon lost all control. Ipan bounced Ruben off the wall and instantly slammed arms into the man with full force.

Ruben tried to deflect the impact. Ipan brushed the puny human arms aside. Ruben's pathetic attempts at defense were like spider webs brushed away.

He butted Ruben and pounded massive shoulders into the man's chest. The weapon clattered on the tiles.

Ipan slammed himself into the man's body again and again.

Strength, power, joy.

Bones snapped. Ruben's head snapped back, smacked the wall, and he went limp.

Ipan stepped back and Ruben sagged to the tiles. *Joy.*

Blue-white flies buzzed at the rim of his vision.

Must move. That was all Leon could get through the curtain of emotions that shrouded the chimp mind.

The corridor lurched. Leon got Ipan to walk in a sidewise teeter.

Down the corridor, painful steps. Two doors, three. Here? Locked. Next door. World moving slower somehow.

The door snicked open. An ante-chamber that he recognized. Ipan blundered into a chair and almost fell. Leon made the lungs work hard. The gasping cleared his vision of the dark edges that had crept in but the blue-white flies were there, fluttering impatiently, and thicker.

He tried the far door. Locked. Leon summoned what he could from Ipan. *Strength, power, joy.* Ipan slammed his shoulder into the solid door. It held. Again. And again, sharp pain — and it popped open.

Right, this was it. The immersion bay. Ipan staggered into the array of vessels. The walk down the line, between banks of control panels, took an eternity. Leon concentrated on each step, placing each foot. Ipan's field of view bobbed as the head seemed to slip around on the liquid shoulders.

Here. His own vessel.

He fumbled with the latches. Popped it open.

There lay Leon Mattick, peaceful, eyes closed.

Emergency controls, yes. He knew them from the briefing.

He searched the polished steel surface and found the panel on the side. Ipan stared woosily at the meaningless lettering and Leon himself had trouble reading. The letters jumped and fused together.

He found several buttons and servo controls. Ipan's hands were stubby, wrong. It took three tries to get the reviving program activated. Lights cycled from green to amber.

Ipan abruptly sat down on the cool floor. The blue-white flies were buzzing all around his head now and they wanted to bite him. He

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sucked in the cool dry air but there was no substance in it, no help...

Then, without any transition, he was looking at the ceiling. On his back. The lamps up there were getting dark, fading. Then they went out.

LEON'S EYES SNAPPED OPEN.

The recovery program was still sending electro-stims through his muscles. He let them jump and tingle and ache while he thought. He felt fine. Not even hungry, as he usually did after an immersion. How long had he been in the wilderness? At least five days.

He sat up. There was no one in the vessel room. Evidently Ruben had gotten some silent alarm, but had not alerted anyone else. That pointed, again, to a tight little conspiracy.

He got out shakily. To get free he had to detach some feeders and probes but they seemed simple enough.

Ipan. The big body filled the walkway. He knelt and felt for a pulse. Rickety.

But first, Kelly. Her vessel was next to his and he started the revival. She looked well.

Ruben must have put some transmission block on the system, so that none of the staff could tell by looking at the panel that anything was wrong. A simple cover story, a couple who wanted a really long immersion. Ruben had warned them, but no, they wanted it, so.... A perfectly plausible story.

Kelly's eyes fluttered. He kissed her. She gasped.

He made a chimp sign, *quiet*, and went back to Ipan.

Blood came steadily. Leon was surprised to find that he could not pick up the rich, pungent elements in the blood from smell alone. A human missed so much!

He took off his shirt and made a crude tourniquet. At least Ipan's breathing was regular. Kelly was ready to get out by then and he helped her disconnect.

"I was hiding in a tree and then — poof!" she said. "What a relief. How did you —"

"Let's get moving," he said.

As they left the room she said, "Who can we trust? Whoever did this —" She stopped when she saw Ruben. "Oh."

Somehow her expression made him laugh. She was very rarely surprised.

"You did this?"

"Ipan."

"I never would have believed a chimp could, could..."

"I doubt anyone's been immersed this long. Not under such stress, anyway. It all just, well, it came out."

He picked up Ruben's weapon and studied the mechanism. A standard pistol, silenced. Ruben had not wanted to awaken the rest of the Station. That was promising. There should be people here who would spring to their aid. He started toward the building where the Station personnel lived.

"Wait, what about Ruben?"

"I'm going to wake up a doctor."

They did — but Leon took him into the vessel room first, to work on Ipan. Some patchwork and injections and the doctor said Ipan would be all right. Only then did he show the man Ruben's body.

The doctor got angry about that, but Leon had a gun. All he had to do was point it. He didn't say anything, just gestured with the gun. He did not feel like talking and wondered if he ever would again. When you couldn't talk you concentrated more, entered into things. Immersed.

And in any case, Ruben had been dead for some time.

Ipan had done a good job. The doctor shook his head at the severe damage.

Kelly looked at him oddly throughout the whole time. He did not understand why, until he realized that he had not even thought about helping Ruben first. Ipan was *himself*, in a sense he could not explain.

But he understood immediately when Kelly wanted to go to the Station wall and call to Sheelah. They brought her, too, in from the wild darkness.

A YEAR LATER, WHEN THE INDUSTRIAL conspiracy had been uncovered and dozens brought to trial, they returned to the Excursion Station.

Leon longed to lounge in the sun, after a year of facing news cameras and attorneys. Kelly was equally exhausted with the rub of events.

But they both immediately booked time in the immersion chambers and spent long hours there. Ipan and Sheelah seemed to greet their return with something approximating joy.

Each year they would return and live inside the minds. Each year they would come away calmer, somehow fuller.

Leon's analysis of sociohistory appeared in a ground-breaking series of papers, modeling all of civilization as a "complex adaptive system." Fundamental to the intricately structured equations were terms allowing for primordial motivations, for group behavior in tension with individual longings, for deep motivations kindled in the veldt, over a thousand millennia ago. This was exact, complex, and original; his papers resounded through the social sciences, which had finally been made quantitative.

Fifteen years later the work received a Nobel prize, then worth 2.3 million New Dollars. Leon and Kelly spent a lot of it on travel, particularly to Africa.

When questioned in interviews, he never spoke of the long trek he and Kelly had undergone. Still, in his technical papers and public forums, he did give chimpanzees as examples of complex, adaptive behavior. As he spoke, he gave a long, slow smile, eyes glittering enigmatically, but would discuss the subject no further. □

SCIENCE

Continued from page 34

chmann had been doing. When they tried to, some of them said they found some excess heat, but not very much; some of them said they found some neutrons, but not very many; and none of the physicists who looked at this, including people like Sheldon Glashow, who is a Nobel prize winner in physics, could come up with any plausible method by which anything could happen. At that point, after this great furor, everything seemed to die down. The price of palladium went back to normal. But there has been a continuing group of people who say cold fusion is real. It does not involve the physical processes that people who deal with hot fusion are used to, but something is there. And some very prestigious people have said that. One of them is Julian Schwinger, also a Nobel Prize winning physicist who died within the last year. And there is a very vocal group of advocates saying that cold fusion is the thing of the future. Unfortunately, if you go to most scientists today, they would still say, 'We don't see any real evidence that anything like the Pons-Fleischmann claims exist.'

BEASON: The Japanese, though...

SHEFFIELD: The Japanese are supporting the research done by Pons and Fleischmann. They are in France, still doing research on this, supported by Toyota. There's also an active group in Italy run by a man called Scaramuzzi. There are people all around the world. What you have not got is a substantial weighty body of influential people who can persuade the community, and, until they do that, nobody will really look on cold fusion as seriously as they would have if Pons and Fleischmann had come out with a conventional approach to making their experiments known.

At the moment, cold fusion is sitting in limbo. A group of people believe it's going to be absolutely wonderful, and a much larger group of people say there's nothing there. I think that unless somebody can come up with a plausible explanation, based on physics, as to how you can continue to generate energy from a palladium electrode in a beaker of heavy water, cold fusion can't win. Chemical energies, the energies that you get from conventional burning of oil or coal or wood, are a million times less than the energies that you get from the nucleus. And the only way you can continue to generate energy month after month from an isolated unit is if you are tapping nuclear energy. Nobody has been able to come up with a plausible explanation for how you might do that without producing the neutrons and gamma rays. People have tried to explain away the absence of radiation by saying that a phenomenon similar to the Mossbauer effect is operating. The Mossbauer effect is one in which a whole lattice of atoms behaves in some circumstances as if it were a single locked unit. And people have said



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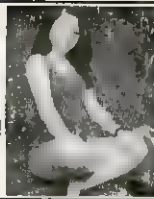
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January 1993— Fiction by Disch, Watt-Evans, Boston/Frazier, Landis/Sfrumolo, Cross, Daniel. Essay by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Gallery—James Gurney—Dinotopia.

March 1993— Fiction by Ellison, Andrews, Bova, Aldridge, Hirsch. Essay by Harlan Ellison.

May 1993— Fiction by Malzberg, Tilton, Bova, Steele, Anteau. Essay by Robert Silverberg. Gallery—Malzberg.

July 1993— Fiction by Piers Anthony, Sheffield, Shelley, Hogan, Blisson. Jurassic Park. Gallery of Jim Burns.

September 1993— SOLD OUT

November 1993— SOLD OUT

January 1994— SOLD OUT

March 1994— Fiction by Parks, Tiedemann, Popkes, Stableford, Liss, Garnett.

May 1994— Fiction by Benford, Di Filippo, Morressey, Aldridge, O'Neill, Sarrantonio. Gallery of Bob Eggleton art.

July 1994— Fiction by Landis, Rich, Wilbur, Malzberg, Shelly, Hood. Gun Control essay by David Brin.

September 1994— Fiction by Marcus, Boston, Wilson, Nelson, Sheskin, Landis, Castro. Essay by Frederik Pohl.

November 94— Fiction by Resnick, DiCarlo, Flerry, Cleary, Moon, Nelson, Brin. Gallery by Harlan Ellison.

January 95— Fiction by Castro, Evans, Steele, Hood, Manison, Clayton. Gallery by Mike Resnick.

March 95— Fiction by Wilbur, Salmonson, Aldridge, Rich, Jeffrey Carver.

May 95— Fiction by DiFilippo, Ben Bova, Rich, Cleary, Benford, Clayton.

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that the gamma ray is being dissipated, or
held on to, by the whole lattice surrounding
it. That's why you don't get killed if you go
near it. There are journals devoted to cold
fusion now. At least two. And there is work
being supported in Japan, in Italy, in France.
Very little in this country by the people you'd
think would be the most interested in it, such
as the Department of Energy.

BEASON: I think that the point of all this
is that fusion is really the second most effi-
cient way of producing energy that we know
of. The most efficient way is matter/anti-mat-
ter. And there are a lot of problems associ-
ated with that. If we could tap into fusion
somehow, either conventional fusion or cold
fusion or whatever, it would change the
world. The nation and the world's economy
runs on energy. We are energy driven. And the
health of our economy, and our future, and
our whole outlook depends upon the quan-
tity of energy and the quality of energy that
we get. We are really at a crossroads. We are
coming up to a point with diminishing num-
bers of chemical fuels, people not accepting
fission fuels, and what do we have left to turn
to? And unless we as a nation do something,
what's going to happen twenty or fifty years
down the road? And that's really where we
need to be looking. And that's really the point
of all this. How does fusion fit into all this?
Not only to be a way to power vehicles for
science fictions stories, but really for the sur-
vival of humanity.

SHEFFIELD: I'm still more of an optimist
than you are about fission. First of all, look-
ing around the world, other countries do not
have the same attitude as this country to fis-
sion energy. If you go to Japan or go to
France—

BEASON: How do you change our atti-
tudes?

SHEFFIELD: You change our attitude by
energy becoming more and more expensive.
At some point people will say, well, I'm will-
ing to take a small risk in order to be able to
cook my dinner.

BEASON: What type of risk are you talking
about? Ten years ago people used to say that
if you measured the amount of radioactivity
you got outside the complex at Three Mile
Island, you'd actually get more radioactivity
flying over the Rockies in an airplane. Which
is true. And you get slightly more radioactiv-
ity if you have two people in bed. So what is
acceptable? But trying to get that across to
the public, so that they can accept fission
energy, I think, is the big obstacle.

SHEFFIELD: But that's a matter of pre-
sentation. I, for instance, am not uncomfort-
able today at the idea of fission power plants.
So far as I can see, the safeguards that we in
this country use are sufficient that we won't
have accidents. Chernobyl was a big disaster,
but I believe Chernobyl would not have hap-
pened with the safety systems in position
today in this country. So it's psychological,
isn't it? It's not real danger.

SF AGE: Is that perception the reason

some people have been leaping on cold fusion
even though it isn't quite plausible, because
they think that if it works we won't have the
risks associated with other forms of energy?

SHEFFIELD: There are several different
reasons. One is it's very appealing, the idea
that you could have your own small personal
fusion reactor. They were talking about some-
thing not only that you could fit in your car,
but something that you could also sit and
watch operate on your living room table. It
gave an independence from big utilities. That
is an idea that people are very attracted to.
Fusion was supposed to be produced with
relatively inexpensive materials [actually, pal-
ladium is not that inexpensive, but it's not
consumed in the process]. Cold fusion
offered a prospect of very inexpensive
energy. Third, there are supposed to be no
environmental side effects. That is one of the
reasons I don't find it plausible. If it was work-
ing as originally advertised, it would have
been spewing neutrons all over everybody.
But it had all these appealing features.

BEASON: In fact, I would love to believe
in cold fusion, but it's like I'm from Mis-
souri—show me; either through experiments
or through theories. Show me something to
grab onto that really works, that's grounded
in good theory. Or good experiment.

SHEFFIELD: It doesn't have to be
grounded in theory, if it works. It's the theo-
rists' job to explain *why* it works.

BEASON: But yet, not even a good theory
has come out.

SF AGE: So is cold fusion a passing fad?

SHEFFIELD: It may be the fuel of the
future. We don't know.

It's certainly true that fusion in *some* form
is a piece of our future. It will happen. It may
not happen in ten years. But provided we
don't find ways to blow ourselves up or
destroy ourselves in some other way, I'm sure
it will be part of our commercial energy pro-
ducing repertoire in a hundred years time.

BEASON: If I were a betting man, I'd do
that final push toward conventional fusion.
Reach break even. Show the commercial
prospects for it. Try to get down the price per
unit energy to something that we could gen-
erate in a typical power plant, so that people
would really jump onto it and really exploit it.
And that's when we're going to see the bene-
fits of having no more coal plants spewing out
pollution and that type of thing, when we
really exploit something like fusion energy.

SHEFFIELD: I'm a great believer in fusion
as a commercial power source, but I would
not put my own money into it today, or in the
next ten years. I think we're talking a time
scale that is twenty or more years out. Maybe
that makes me a pessimist.

BEASON: In fact, Charles, I think that
makes you an optimist. Even the Depart-
ment of Energy is saying that they figure that
the first working commercial fusion reactor
is on a fifty-year horizon. Fifty. I just hope it
works. Let's do it. Let's do it for tomorrow,
and our kids.□

BOOKS

Continued from page 16

full swing when the story was written) as it is a meditation on revenge and duty. I would have liked to see the original ending, but the one in this version is definitely satisfying.

Intersections is a terrific anthology with wonderful stories by great writers. It is also a look into the ideal of what SF workshops can be. The fourteen writers at SycHill spent a week helping one another craft "Adequate Science Fiction," and now we get to enjoy it.

Eric T. Baker

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

If SF were to elect a Poet Laureate, the post's most logical first candidate would inarguably be Bruce Boston. His exquisitely crafted poems have earned him an unprecedented four Rhysling Awards from the Science Fiction Poetry Association. *Sensuous Debris: Selected Poems 1970-1995* (Dark Regions Press, trade paperback, \$6.95, 96 pages) gathers his finest poems from the past quarter century, both from his ten previous collections as well as his hundreds of as yet uncollected verses. In "Curse of the Telepath's Wife," one of Boston's finest from his series examining various SFnal and horrific metaphors of romantic love, "Her feminine wiles are useless./There is no way to surprise him./Her slightest thought of infidelity/she must wear as a brand of infidelity." Boston illuminates the sense of wonder that is science fiction, as in "For Spacers Snarled in the Hair of Comets," when he tells his readers that "you know how sleek and fleshy/how treacherous, the stars can become." When he writes, yes, we do know, but we also know that Boston's artful poetry can serve to protect us from that treachery.

One day, an expatriate Frenchman (or so the apocryphal story goes) was having dinner with a group of his American friends. They had tired of hearing him proclaim how much better France was than the place he lived now, and so, sick of his complaints about the state of his new country, they asked him why, if he loved his native land so much, he was living *here*. "My dear friends," he replied, with a tear in his eye, "no one who loves France could possibly live there nowadays." John Clute is such a lover, and his inamorata is science fiction. No other critic speaks his mind with such candor. As he explains in his newest collection, *Look at the Evidence* (Serconia Press, 472 pages, hardcover, \$30.00, trade paperback \$15.00), "It is the truth that sets us free, and reviewers who will not tell the truth are like cholesterol. They are lumps of fat. They starve the heart." Clute's reviews not only take heart, they take guts as well, for no other authority so artfully tells SF's emperors they need a new suit of clothes. Find out for yourself why Clute's previous collection of critical writings, *Strokes*, won a ReaderCon Small Press Award, and the Science Fiction Research Association has given him a Pilgrim Award for his life's work. □

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Cory Doctorow has been published in the magazines *On Spec* and *Pulphouse*, as well as the anthology *Air Fish*. He is a graduate of the Clarion Science Fiction Writing Workshop. Lately, he has parlayed his computer expertise into a role as producer of the CD-ROM adaptation of the sadly defunct *Prisoners of Gravity* TV show. **D. Douglas Fratz** was the editor and publisher of *Quantum*, a magazine of SF criticism that was a five-time Hugo nominee. He is currently the assistant editor of *Science Fiction Eye*. His book reviews have appeared in *Fantasy Review* and the *Washington Post*. By day, he is an environmental scientist in Washington, D.C.

Resa Nelson recently sold reprint rights to "The Dragonslayer's Sword" from our first issue to the anthology *Dragons*, due out shortly from StarLance. Her story this issue is a sequel to that earlier tale. By day, Nelson is a technical writer for Oracle. Her most recent short story sale was to *Tomorrow*. **Eric T. Baker** has been published in *F&SF*, and will see a new short story out soon in *IASFM*. His writing has covered the gamut from fiction to gaming modules, as well as book and game reviews. His agent is currently marketing his first novel, *Kriegspiel*, an SF police procedural set on a fleet of colony ships.

David G. Hartwell is one of science fiction's most literate and influential book editors. He has been nominated for a Best Editor Hugo seven times. As an anthologist, Hartwell has been responsible for numerous volumes that are a must-have for any serious reader in the field, such as *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF* and *The Dark Descent*. **Dan Perez** recently edited a special issue magazine for Sovereign Media, *Sci-Fi TV Fall Preview*. He has short stories in the

anthologies *100 Vicious Little Vampires*, *Xanadu 3* and *100 Wicked Little Witches*.

Ian Watson, born in 1943, has been a full-time author for twenty-five years. His recent publications include his extraterrestrial epic published in two volumes, *Lucky's Harvest* and *The Fallen Moon*. These novels, inspired by Finnish mythology, resulted in his appearing as guest of honor at Finland's first mid-winter SF convention. The most recent of his over one hundred short stories were gathered in his eighth short story collection, *The Coming of Vertumnus*, published in 1994. **Don D'Amassa** has been reading and collecting SF for thirty-five years. He has published nearly a hundred short stories as well as the novel *Blood Beast*, and is the book reviewer for *Science Fiction Chronicle*.



Mary O'Keefe Young

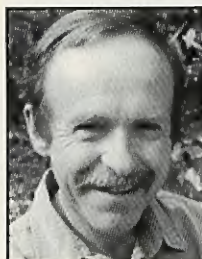


Dan Perez

BOB EGGLETON WAS THE WINNER OF a Best Artist Hugo at Conadian, the World Science Fiction Convention held in 1994 in Winnipeg. *Alien Horizon*, the first collection of his work, has recently appeared from Paper Tiger, and a collectible trading card series spotlighting his career will soon be out from Friedlander. **Mary O'Keefe Young** is a 1982 graduate of the Parsons school of Design in New York City. She enjoys costuming her family and friends and using them as models in her art studio in her home in White Plains.

Julie A. Stevens has published short stories in *Realms of Fantasy*, *F&SF*, *IASFM*, *Whispers* and numerous horror anthologies edited by Charles Grant. **Charles M. Saplak** has recently sold fiction to Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword and Sorceress XIII* anthology and the magazines *Transversion* and *Tomorrow*. His story "Lady's Portrait Executed in Archaic Colors" was selected for *The Year's Best Horror Stories XXII*.

Gregory Benford, a leading proponent of Hard SF, has been publishing professionally for over thirty years. Since 1979 he has been a professor of physics at the University of California, Irvine. His novel *Timescape* won both the Nebula and John W. Campbell Memorial awards. **David Mattingly** has had paintings appear recently on the cover of the Charles Sheffield anthology *How to Save the World* as well as in our July 1995 Gallery section. □



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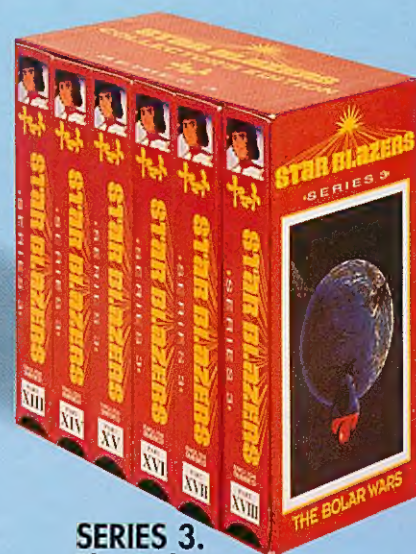
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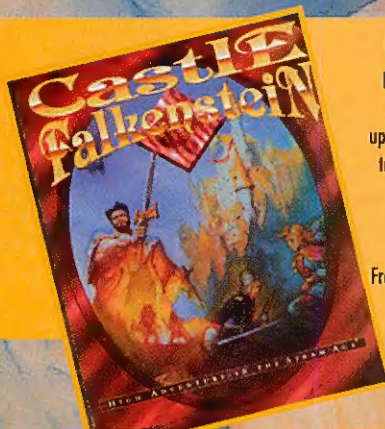
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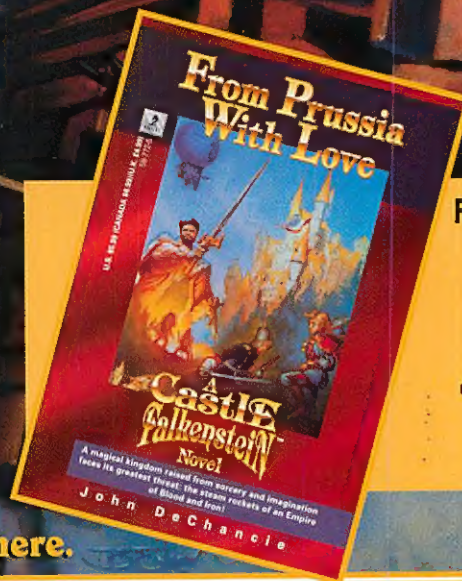
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